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The Mad Hunter; OR, THE CAVE OF DEATH.

BY BURTON SAGE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FARMER AND THE TRAGEDY.

"ORDER in the court!"
"Whist, ye spalpeens! Listen to the judge."
"Gentlemen of the jury, take your hats off. Fetch in the first prisoner."

The scene was in the young settlement of Dorville, in the wilderness of Northern New York, in the year 1806. The first court of Common Pleas had been sitting in the fore part of the day, and a half-hour before had been pronounced formally adjourned by Judge Tyler, the grave and dignified farmer who had been officiating in that lawful capacity. No sooner had the adjournment been announced than Frank Hyde had mounted the vacated seat of justice and announced that a free-and-easy court would now be holden for the trial of delinquents. A jury had been impaneled by the original process of calling on a dozen of the "boys" to take seats in the appointed place, and "Judge" Hyde had immediately commenced operations.

"Here's the first," said Jo Ransom, dragging forward a rough-looking backwoodsman.

"What's yer name?" asked the mock-judge.

"None o' yer business," answered the fellow, surlily.

"What's his name, officer?"

"Matthew Hinds, yer Honor."

"What's the charge?"

"Sneakin', yer Honor."

"Prisoner, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"I say," said the man in an angry tone, "I don't want anything to do with this cursed nonsense."

"Gentlemen of the jury, you hear the evidence. The prisoner pleads guilty to the charge of sneakism. What's the verdict?"

"Guilty in the first degree," shouted the hilarious jurymen, in concert.

"Prisoner, you're fined a shilling for the benefit of the crowd. Shell out!"

"I'll be quits with you for this, Frank Hyde," said Hinds, in a tone whose earnest character there was mistaking, as he threw a piece on the table.

"Hold on, prisoner. You're fined another shilling for contempt of court."

Hinds drew forth another shilling, with an ugly glance at his persecutor, and withdrew.

"Fetch up the next."

"Here you are, sir," and another charged with sneaking was dragged forward, and duly fined. There was no appeal from the decisions of the merry court, and three or four more were fined for the same offense—which consisted in "playing off," and refusing to join in the sport. Although so good-natured in their fun, it was no easy matter to avoid the demands of the rough crowd, and Matthew Hinds, in common with his fellow—"culprits," knew that there was but one way to get rid of the persecution—namely, to pay the fine. Hinds, however, was the only man who showed ill-temper on the occasion. He withdrew to the edge of the crowd, and grumbled viciously to those about him. If any explanation of his ill-temper were needed,

further than the fact that he was invariably a sulky, morose fellow, it would have been found in the fact that among the laughing spectators of the scene was brown-eyed Molly Brayton, before whom Hinds was specially averse to appearing in a ridiculous light—particularly aggravating at this time from the fact that Frank Hyde, the mock-judge, was his rival in the affections of his buxom Molly. He presently left the school-house in which the court was held, and repaired to the tavern across the way to appease his wrath with whisky.

Meantime the fun went on.
"What's the charge against this man?" asked Frank, in the soberest of voices, as the mock-officer led to the bar no less a person than Judge Tyler, the grave farmer we have mentioned.

"Stealin', yer Honor," said Ransom.

"Guilty or not guilty," asked Frank.

"Your Honor," said Judge Tyler, humoring the joke, "I plead not guilty to the charge."

"Search him," said Frank.
Ransom thereupon thrust his hands into the pockets of Judge Tyler's blue sack—and drew forth a quantity of dough, whereupon he was fined fifty cents on the spot.

"Officer, arrest that man for smoking in court."

The offender, John Bartlett, being fined, gravely resumed his pipe again.

"Arrest that man over again," cried Hyde.

"Hold on, judge, that ain't fair. That was a fine for a pipe-full; ye ought let me finish it."

Thereupon a long argument followed among the counsel arrayed on the opposite sides of the question; and it was finally decided to fine him again, as the easiest way of settling the dispute.

Another man was fined for being sleepy, another for whistling; and one poor fellow who had actually hidden away from the tribunal behind some barrels in an out-house, was dragged up for cowardice. The young man pleaded in extenuation that he couldn't spare the money and was so afraid of being fined that he thought the best way would be to keep shady.

An argument followed on the quality of the offense, counsel for the prisoner contending that cowardice was not a crime but a disease. This conclusion was finally admitted, whereupon Hyde remarked:

"It being proven that Corlis Smith is guilty of the disease of cowardice, this court prescribes an emetic to be administered at once."

This diversion of the business of the court, broke up the session.



THE MAD HUNTER.

A coroner's jury was next impaneled for the purpose of "sitting" on the body of Pat Donnel, a roistering Irishman, who had been a keen participant in the sport. And Pat being spread out on a board and covered with a cloth, the inquest proceeded; ending with kicking over the board and sending the Irishman sprawling.

Following this the crowd gathered in front of the tavern, and began to indulge in those athletic games which always characterized the gatherings of the early settlers in that region. Frank Hyde was a leader in these games, and one after another in the wrestling-match he "downed" the youth of the settlement. At last Matthew Hinds tackled with him, and after a fierce struggle the sulky fellow came heavily to the ground.

To the horror of the spectators he turned upon the unsuspecting Frank, and plunged his long knife into the poor lad's side, with a fierce curse.

For a moment the rough crowd stood appalled, scarcely believing their eyes; but as Frank Hyde reeled and fell forward upon his face, a dozen stalwart men sprung upon Hinds and disarmed him; after which they proceeded to tie his hands and feet with stout handkerchiefs, and bore him into the tavern. Here he was kept under guard all night, and the next day another session of court was held in the old school-house. This court was presided over by Squire Jones, the only Justice of Peace in that section, and it was generally understood that a conviction before him was equal to a final sentence. Matthew Hinds knew, as he looked about him on the now stern faces of the settlers, that he was a doomed man, and would hang to the nearest tree. He was as universally hated as Frank Hyde was beloved.

There was but one hope for him: young Hyde still breathed. Though momentarily expected to yield up his life, there was hope so long as the breath remained in his body. To await the event of the struggle between life and death, Hinds was again placed under guard in a room of the tavern.

That night a gang of ten men broke into the room where Hinds lay, and bore him away to the woods in the rear of the settlement.

In vain the wretched man begged for mercy. In vain he cried out that Hyde was not dead—he could not be hung unless his victim died. They bore him to a tree, and put the noose about his neck.

The tree which the excited settlers had selected for the fearful execution was a large maple, standing on the edge of a curious cave, whose yawning mouth opened

beneath the spreading branches. The rope had been fastened to a huge limb which projected over the gulf, and after placing the noose about the assassin's neck, they pushed him off. There was a brief struggle, and the swaying body dangled over the dark opening in the earth.

It had hung but a moment, when the lynchers heard the shouts and saw the torches of the approaching villagers, who had been aroused by the keeper of the tavern, and were coming to the rescue.

"Cut him down, boys, quick; he's dead enough by this time. Let him go."

And a dark form ran out upon the overreaching limb of the maple, and with one stroke of the knife severed the cord. The body tumbled down into the gloomy cavern; the lynchers plunged into the wood; and silence fell over the dark scene.

A minute later the villagers, with their torches, had come upon the spot where the execution had taken place, but there were now no signs to indicate the place of the tragedy. They passed the fearful maple unconscious that it had been the gallows-tree, and for a long time beat about in the wood, but in vain. No traces of the prisoner or his captors could be found; and after some hours they gave up the search.

Meantime they had been joined from the rear by the ten men who had broken into the tavern and overpowered the guard; and the lynchers had joined in the search with as much seeming earnestness as the others. The two men guarding the prisoner had been overpowered and blindfolded at the first onset, and had never seen the faces of the captors; so that who they were remained a mystery to all the settlement save the ten men themselves.

The Black Cave was a spot well known by reputation among the villagers, though it had never been explored except by one or two of the most adventurous. It was possible to descend into it only by the aid of ropes, and in the brightest daylight the interior was shrouded in impenetrable darkness. Matthew Hinds had been one of the first to penetrate the gloomy gorge, in company with another, both carrying torches and wearing a strong rope about their waists, the remote end of which was in the hands of their companions up above. After clambering down the side of the opening a few feet, they struck a steep, sloping channel, thick with a slimy, slippery deposit, down which they carefully slid to the bottom of the channel. Here they found themselves in a large chamber, with a roof in the form of a Gothic arch, running to an acute angle high above their heads. Numer-

ous projecting masses of flint of a dark hue were observable in the sides and ceiling, and in the center was a pool of black water. They spent an hour in endeavoring to find some outlet to this subterranean chamber; but there was none whatever. It was one vast room, with solid stone walls in which there was neither crack nor crevice of any sort. They endeavored to make their way out by clambering up the steep slope of the channel by which they had entered, but it was impossible. The slimy sediment slipped from beneath their feet, which could gain no hold whatever, and at last they were dragged out by the ropes in the hands of those above, their clothes drabbled with the black slime in which they had been compelled to prostrate themselves, for there was no such thing as gaining a footing for one moment.

Hinds had recognized the neighborhood in the instant that the fatal noose was adjusted about his neck. All the dark horrors of that hopeless cavern flashed across his memory in the instant, and he knew that it was to be his tomb.

The thought of searching the Black Cave did not enter the minds of the settlers; for, in truth, there was nothing to direct their attention thither, any more than to the numerous other caves which abounded in the region along the shores of the Kahuahgo, as the river was still called at that early period, when the Seneca Indians were not yet wholly driven from the country. So the weeks rolled on, and the mysterious disappearance of the culprit began to be remembered as a wild dream.

Frank Hyde recovered at last, though for many weeks he lingered doubtfully between life and death. But youth and health finally won the mastery, and, at last, the feeble young man began once more to make his appearance among the settlers.

Happy were the hours of his convalescence in the bright summer days of that beautiful region. His almost constant companion was the brown-eyed Molly Brayton, whose love for him had appeared in undisguised warmth under the dreadful fears of the death that hung over the being most dear to her of all on earth.

As he regained his full health and strength, one all-absorbing desire seemed to have taken possession of Frank Hyde's mind—namely, to discover, if possible, the fate of Matthew Hinds. He spent the greater portion of several weeks in the search after some traces of the place of execution, but in vain. He still entertained a wild hope that his foe had managed to escape alive, for he was not one to cherish animosity against the man who had

struck at his life in a moment of passion. He was one of the few who knew that Hinds had viewed him in the light of a favored rival; and, strange as it may seem to some, he felt a degree of sympathy for the man who could not obtain a place in the heart of the girl he himself idolized.

All his efforts to obtain a clue to the men who had effected the capture of the prisoner were in vain. At last, he was reluctantly abandoning the search, when, one evening, he found the following note crumpled in a ball on his bed, where it had, doubtless, been tossed through the open window:

"You kin quit looking for Matt Hinds. He was hung over the Black Kave, and his boddy was droped into hell by that rowt."

Determined to learn the truth of this assertion, Frank Hyde, on the following day, proceeded to the entrance of the Black Cave in company with a half-dozen companions, and choosing Pat Donnel for his mate, together they descended into the depths of the cavern, by the aid of ropes, and carrying torches.

"Howly Mother!" cried Pat, as they stumbled down the slimy passage, "this is th' ould devil's hole itself!"

They found the statement of the note too true. There was nothing now in the Black Cave but a hideous, moldy skeleton, which grinned a ghastly adieu to the two men as they left the cavern by the slippery route they came.

CHAPTER II.

The Marked Balls.

A WILD, dark island was that which lay in the middle of the furious river, opposite the settlement. It presented to the gazer a rocky front, on its every side. Around it the foaming torrent rolled madly, chafing against the base of the dark line of cliffs, whose summit was crowned with a dense growth of spruce and low cedar. The eye could not penetrate into the gloomy depths, and this fact, added to the black hue of its rocky shore, had given it the name of Night Island. No living thing ever had been seen upon it.

The falls of Kahuahgo, whose ceaseless thunder rose night and day, just above the settlement, were divided in two by Night Island. Above the falls, the current was smooth, but furious in its speed, as it rushed onward to the giddy brink of the double fall, dividing the waters of the island; and tumbling over the foaming precipice, they rushed on more madly than ever for a distance of half a mile, and joined their seething current only to be hurled again over a

second, but smaller fall, that lay just below the island's foot.

No attempt had ever been made to reach this solitary island from the settlement. The most courageous spirit shrunk appalled before the horrors of that boiling, plunging current of death. For death would certainly have been the fate of the man who should have attempted the rash voyage. It could not be approached from above, for such was the swiftness of the current that the boat would inevitably have been dashed to pieces on the frowning island rocks, if, perchance, it had been possible so to steer as to avoid being swept away over the cataract. It could not be approached from a point anywhere opposite its rock-bound shore, for there was the deep and foaming torrent, in which no boat—not even a birchen canoe—would live for a moment after putting out. Nor could it be approached from below, for the lower cataract shut off that hope. Moreover, if by any miracle a boat had reached its shores, a landing could never have been effected, for the towering line of black precipice was unbroken.

Rugged and solitary, Night Island stood, a stone's throw from the settlement; but in its isolation more complete than if it had reared its beetling front in the midst of the far ocean; night and day, crowned with its dense growth of spruce and cedar, it preserved the solemn majesty of its utter loneliness.

It was soon after the closing event narrated in the last chapter—that is, the exploration and discovery of the skeleton by Frank Hyde in the Black Cave—that three men were standing at the dawn of day on the shore of the river, gazing into the foaming flood.

"The old island is as dark as ever this mornin'," said Jo Ransom, as he gazed across the stream; "hanged ef it don't always seem to me as ef the mornin' didn't break quite so airy over there as it does on this side of the gully."

"It is a dark spot," said Frank Hyde, as his eyes took the direction of his companion's.

"Whist! Howly Mother!" cried Pat Donnel, the third of the group, at this juncture.

"My God, Frank!" uttered Ransom, in the same breath with the Irishman, "do you see that?"

Hyde dashed his hands across his eyes, as if doubting their testimony, before he responded:

"I see it! What can it possibly mean?"

A line of smoke was curling up from amid the thick evergreens on Night Island.

"Mean?" quoth Ransom, fortifying himself with a huge chew of tobacco, "it means impossibility."

"There is somebody on the island!"

"I say 'tain't possible," said Ransom again, in a tone of great excitement, as he strained his eyes toward the curling line of smoke, and rolled his quid rapidly about in his mouth.

"You've the evidence of your eyes, Jo."

"'Tain't possible!" quoth Ransom again, whose astonishment seemed to have deprived him of the power of more than this simple reiteration.

"Smoke means fire," said Hyde; "fire has to be kindled; it takes a human being to kindle a fire; there is somebody on the island."

"'Tain't possible! 'tain't possible!" whispered Jo, ejecting a volume of tobacco juice from his lips.

"It's the devil!" said Pat Donnel.

A momentary silence followed, during which the three men, as if actuated by a common impulse, gazed up and down the river along the black shores opposite, seemingly to satisfy themselves once more of the fierce perils of the approach to Night Island.

At that instant, the sharp crack of a rifle was faintly heard above the roar of the river, and a bullet whistled close to Ransom's head, burying itself in a great elm behind him.

"That's good argument," said Jo, as the trio hastily stepped back from the shore.

The village was soon in a high state of excitement, over the announcement, and some hurried to the spot to look at the bullet.

"The devil's own," persisted Pat Donnel.

"He sends a mighty human ball, anyhow," was the response of John Bartlett, as he dug the bullet from the elm with his knife.

Never was bullet examined with such interest by human beings as was this. As Jo Ransom was looking closely at it as it lay in his palm, a flash of pallor shot across his browned face.

"For God's sake, Frank, look at this! See them letters?"

"M. H.," said Frank, as he took the ball. "Sure's life, there's two letters scratched on it—M. H."

"M. H.," said Pat Donnel; "what'd I tell yes? It's his mark! It means Mas-ther o' Hell! The devil sent it."

But no one laughed at the superstitious Irishman's remark. They thought with one mind whose initials they were.

"M. H.," spoke Jo Ransom, "stands for Matthew Hinds, the man we hung—the

man, I mean, that was hung over the Black Cave."

"Matthew Hinds," said Hyde, "is dead, and his skeleton is in the great chamber in the cave. I saw it there."

"Faith, so did I," said Donnel. "Matt Hinds is dead, an' the ould one's took his name."

"Ransom," said John Bartlett, an hour later, as they stood alone in the wood back of the settlement, "this means something."

"It means more nor you nor I can unravel," said Ransom, solemnly. He had hardly spoken a word till now since the discovery of the initials, but seemed to be turning the dark subject over in his mind. It was plain that he was laboring under an uncommon excitement, for he chewed prodigious quantities of tobacco, a sure indication of mental disturbance with him.

"Do you suppose Matt Hinds fired that shot?"

"Whoever fired that shot, John Bartlett, it wasn't a live man. No creetur could ever git to Night Island—'tain't possible."

"And Matt Hinds is dead. That we know."

"We do. I cut the rope myself, you know. And his skeleton lies in the Black Cave. If any livin' man ever could git on th' island—which ain't possible—that man ain't Matt Hinds."

"That's a dead-sure fact," said Bartlett, solemnly.

"And it's my belief," the hunter added, "that it's his spirit. That's my belief."

The pair stood leaning on their rifles for some moments in silence. At last Bartlett heaved a long-drawn sigh.

"Well," said he, "I must go to my traps."

And the two separated; Ransom to return to the settlement, and Bartlett to look after his wolf-traps. Wolves were numerous in that region at this time, and the Government bounty of ten dollars offered for their carcasses induced many hunters to make it a leading business to trap them. Bartlett was one of the most successful of the wolf-trappers.

Plunging into the depths of the forest, he pursued his way in silence for a distance of about a mile and a half in a direct line away from the river-bank. At last he drew near a point where his first trap stood. When still within a few rods of the spot, he saw a panther spring up from where it had been crouching, and immediately dart off in an opposite direction, with one of his hind legs in a trap. Bartlett immediately raised his rifle and fired, but he missed his aim, and the game sprung into a thicket and disappeared.

"Curse it," he muttered, angrily, "that

infernal story has turned my brain, I believe, and I can't see straight. The idee o' missing the animal at that distance!"

Turning upon his heel, the hunter made all haste back to his house, a mile away, in the woods back of the village, and, taking his dog with him, returned as speedily as possible to the point where the game had disappeared in the thicket. He was rewarded by seeing the head of a panther emerge from the bushes, some five rods off. This time his aim was better, and the animal fell dead. On arriving at the side of his prey, he found that it was not the one with the trap upon his leg.

Meantime, a rain had begun to fall, and it was with great difficulty that he could reload his rifle; but rightly conjecturing that the other panther could not be far away, he took great care to effect the reloading, and finally succeeded. He was not a moment too soon, for looking up he beheld his faithful dog engaged in a fierce battle with the second panther. Fearing to kill his dumb servant, which had the wild beast by the throat, Bartlett dared not aim near the head of the animal, but having no time to spare just then, he discharged his piece and succeeded in wounding the huge fellow. It was impossible to load again, for the rain was descending in torrents, and throwing down his gun he drew his hatchet from his belt and rushed upon the foe, just as it in its turn whirled upon him and sprung. A fierce struggle followed, and resulted in the panther's falling on his back, but with the hunter's right hand in his mouth. The hatchet, meanwhile, had been lost in the fierce wrestle for the mastery.

The position was one which might have appalled a stouter heart than John Bartlett's, but he had no thought of yielding. With his left hand he drew his jack-knife from his pocket, opened it with his teeth, and throwing himself forward in one furious effort of his fast-waning strength, he finally succeeded in cutting the animal's throat. At this moment the crack of a rifle rung through the wood, and a cheery voice cried, "Hang on, John—hang on! Don't give up, John!"

It was Frank Hyde who rushed to the spot, and grasped the fainting hunter in his arms.

"Hurrah!" he cried, "nobly done! You'd no need of my help, Bartlett. But, good heavens, you're hurt."

"Frank Hyde! You! What in natur' does this mean?"

"Yes, it's me. Come, you'll have to leave the beast for the present. I've got to carry you home on my back, old fellow."

"Frank!" said the hunter, eagerly, "you fired that shot?"

"Me! No! I fired no shot!"

"You didn't fire, the minute you hollered?" said the hunter, with eyes fastened on his friend's face.

"No. My piece isn't loaded. But now I think of it I did hear a rifle-crack. I was so excited I didn't notice it at the moment. Who was it? Do you know?"

But the hunter had fainted; and throwing the supine form upon his back, Frank Hyde trotted off at a brisk pace. He was beyond all comparison the strongest man in that region, and he bore his burden easily, reaching the hunter's house in a few minutes.

Mrs. Bartlett quickly stripped her husband's breast, and with a brisk dash of water in his face, and the application of camphor to his nostrils, revived him from his swoon.

The hand that had been in the panther's mouth was fearfully torn, and the arm was bloody to the shoulder; but Mrs. Bartlett soon washed away the blood, and then it was that they perceived a bullet-wound in the fore-arm just below the elbow.

"Why, for God's sake, Bartlett, how is this?" cried Frank; "you're shot!"

Bartlett shook his head sadly.

"Some one fired on me, Frank. I can't understand it. It couldn't 'a been you, for the ball come from 'tother direction."

Hyde was silent, and exchanged glances with Mrs. Bartlett, which expressed more mystification than any thing else.

The doctor was soon brought from the village, and the shattered arm examined. They found that the bullet had struck the bone of the arm, and lodged near the elbow. It was extracted, and the wound dressed as well as possible; but the physician expressed the belief that the arm would have to be amputated.

Hyde was tossing the bullet in his hand, when he suddenly uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What's the matter?" asked Bartlett.

"Doctor, do you see the letters scratched on this ball?"

"M. H.!" said the doctor, as he examined it.

"The same that were on the bullet from Night Island!" cried Bartlett, as a shudder ran through his frame.

Yes. There were the strange initials again. What could they mean?

CHAPTER III.

The Black Hunter's Sign.

Far away to the westward lived Oney-

anha, otherwise the Beech-tree. His hair was white as the snow in the valleys, and his bronzed face was seared with the wrinkles of many winters, for Oneyanha was more than a hundred years old. He was the patriarch of his tribe.

One day he gathered about him the braves of his tribe.

"My children," he said, "Oneyanha's feet tremble on the borders of the grave. His heart turns longingly toward the hunting-ground beyond the setting of the sun, where the spirits of his brothers await his coming. Oneyanha has had a dream. The Great Spirit came to his lodge, and said that the hour of his death drew nigh. Go, said the Great Spirit, go, Oneyanha, to the resting-place of the bones of your departed brothers, in the great cave far away on the banks of the rolling Kahuahgo, where the white man has built his wigwam. Go, Oneyanha; you must look once more on the bones of your brothers in the great cave, before you die."

The old man looked about upon the circle of braves that listened to his words. They bowed their heads in silent assent.

"My children," he said, "I go. When the sun goes down again, Oneyanha will be far away on the path to the great cave."

Then Alawistonis, the young chief of the tribe, spoke:

"Oneyanha is old," said he. "He will perish on the long way. Once our father was mighty in the battle, and his arrow was swift in seeking the heart of the panther and the deer. But now his glory is past. The wild wolf and the crouching panther will beset his way. He will fall before them. He must not go alone. Alawistonis will go with him, and bring him back in safety to his children."

But Oneyanha shook his head.

"Alawistonis is good to the aged chief," he said. "But the Great Spirit has spoken. Oneyanha will go alone. If he does not return before three suns have passed, look for him no more. His bones will rest in the great cave with those of his brethren, and his spirit will be on its journey to the great hunting-ground. I go, my children. Adieu."

And the white-haired Indian plunged into the depths of the forest, and was seen no more.

Onward he sped, as fast as his trembling limbs could bear him, till at last the roar of the falls of Kahuahgo broke upon his ear. He was faint and weary, but now he knew that he drew nigh to the end of his long pilgrimage. He saw the smoke of the settlers' cabins rising and mingling in the mist of the great falls, but he turned

his face away, and sought the depths of the forest.

At last he reached the entrance to the cave he sought. No eye had looked upon it in many years, for it was hidden deep in a growth of shrubbery, and a stone covered the mouth. The white hunters might have passed that spot a hundred times, and never have seen the entrance to this strange cave. There were many caves in that region, and one of these was the Black Cave; others were known by the names of the Ice Cave, the Cave of Rooms, the Cave of the Altar, etc., but the great cave that Oneyanha sought was unknown to the whites.

The Indian pilgrim pushed aside the bushes and stooped before the stone. He muttered some words in the Indian tongue, seemingly a form of prayer, for the great cave was sacred to the bones of the dead, and could only be approached with ceremony by the Indian who held to his fathers' faith. Then he pushed aside the stone, and entered, and the rock fell into its place again and shut the old patriarch into the darkness.

But Oneyanha was prepared. Lighting a pine-knot that he held in his hand, the blaze of his torch threw its glare far before him. He was in a low passageway where he could not stand upright, but he knew the path, and pressed on with weary feet to the great Chamber of the Dead, which lay at the end of a long and winding labyrinth, with many turnings and changes, that would greatly have confused any but himself.

Long he remained in the chamber of the dead, communing with the spirits of the braves whose bones lay all about him, and singing mournful Indian hymns in a strange unearthly tone.

At last his vigil was ended, and Oneyanha returned by the long and winding route, to the open air, and bent his face again toward the wigwams of his children.

But the dangers he had passed in safety on his long route had led the patriarch to relax his vigilance; or perhaps the solemn scene where he had been passing the recent hours still left their impress on his mind, to the exclusion of external impressions.

He was startled at seeing a large she-wolf standing in his path, snapping her sharp teeth and growling fiercely. Oneyanha had a brave heart, but he was old and feeble, and more than ever just at this time, when he had fasted long and traveled far. Nevertheless, he drew his long hunting-knife quickly, and engaged in a fierce struggle with his antagonist. In the end he succeeded in thrusting his knife in the

animal's heart, but alas, his own strength was nearly expended, and he fell upon the ground by the side of his dead foe, bleeding at several wounds. He feared that he must die in the forest alone, for no help was near.

Suddenly he heard the crackling of a bush, and turning beheld a white man approaching. The appearance of the newcomer was haggard and revolting. His beard was long and ragged, and his fingernails were of such length that they resembled the claws of a wild beast. He was ragged and filthy, and the expression of his countenance was ferocious. There was little in that fierce face to encourage hope, but Oneyanha appealed to him for help.

"The red-man will die," he said, "unless his white brother helps him."

The man laughed scornfully, and pushed the prostrate Indian with his foot.

"What's it to me whether you die or not?" he growled. "Death won't hurt ya. I'll help ye to it."

And the man drew his knife and made as if about to strike the bleeding Indian to the heart.

"Beware!" cried the old man; "Oneyanha has many sons. The Great Spirit sent him here, and if the white man strikes the worm under his feet, the Great Spirit will tell Oneyanha's sons. Then beware their vengeance!"

Again the man laughed that cruel laugh, and pushed the Indian with his foot.

"Take me to the home of the white settlers by the river-side," the Indian pleaded. "They will not kill the old chief, for my tribe are the white man's friends."

"I'll take ye to kingdom come first," said the man. "I hate the white settlers! I've sworn to have thar' blood." Then, as if a wild thought struck him, he muttered to himself, "Better nor that; I'll send 'em my love ag'in."

The old chief noted the change in his aspect, and a gleam of hope shot through his breast.

"Here!" cried the hunter, springing forward; "take that!" and he cut seven quick gashes in the old Indian's forehead; "'tain't a mile to the settlement. I'll resk but you can drag yerself thar' fore night. Go to the white man, show him yer forehead, and tell him the Black Hunter of Night Island sent ye!"

And with another laugh of scorn and hate, the man turned on his heel and disappeared.

Left to himself, the old Indian wiped the blood from his forehead, as it trickled from the cuts, and struggled to his feet. The cuts were light; they went hardly below

the skin; and the Indian wondered why they had been inflicted on him.

Cutting a short staff from the forest, Oneyanha took the path leading to the settlement. It was a painful journey, but he dragged himself wearily on, ever and anon wiping away the blood that trickled into his eyes from the seven cuts, obstructing his sight. He knew not what they were; but they had been made with a purpose by the haggard hunter. Four were vertical; one was horizontal; and two were slanting; and they made two letters—these: M. H.

It was twilight when Oneyanha at last dragged his fainting form into the village. A knot of men were standing before the tavern, for it was a mild, pleasant evening. He drew near them, and fell prone at their feet.

"Why, it's an old Injin," said Jo Ransom, as he bent over him. He's had a tussle with a painter in the bush, I reckon."

"Poor old fellow," said Frank Hyde, lifting the Indian's head upon his knee; "I wonder what he's doing here. There ain't an Indian village in twenty miles, that I know of."

They bore him into the tavern, and laid him on a rude bench. Pat Donnel brought some water, and they bathed his bloody face.

"Mother o' Heaven!" cried Pat, in great alarm; "d'ye see him? It's himself!"

The settlers clustered about, staring in mute wonderment at the initials, which had now become associated in their minds with horrible mystery.

"Where did you get that mark?" asked Frank Hyde, at last.

And in answer, Oneyanha related the incident in the wood. The settlers exchanged wondering looks with each other, but said little.

"Can it be that Matthew Hinds lives?" remarked Hyde, in a distressed tone.

"Matt Hinds is dead, I say," spoke Jo Ransom, in a loud and excited voice. "What cursed nonsense!"

"We found his skiletton," said Donnel; "faix, boys, there's on'y wan way out o' the wonderment. Matt Hinds's ghost is walkin' by day, and hauntin' Night Island the while. Wan o' thim days we'll see him here! My word fer't!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Lost One.

THE settlers in that wild region were tender-hearted men, generally speaking. Their sympathies were strong, and their

sufferings all in common. But there were many of them who had extremely superstitious natures, and these were by no means anxious to do for the old Indian those kind offices which they otherwise would have all been anxious to bestow. He was immediately connected, now, with the mystery of Night Island, and there were some of them who openly scouted the story the Indian had told, pronouncing it some devilish ruse to accomplish evil ends.

But Frank Hyde was not one of these. It required no deliberation on his part to show him the line of action he should follow. He immediately prepared a place for the old man in the cabin he now occupied by himself; for it must be mentioned here, Frank's wedding with sweet Molly Brayton was appointed for a night of that very week, and he had prepared a home for his bride. But his cabin was large enough for more than himself and wife; he had built it with an eye to the happy future; and he knew that kind-hearted Molly would not hesitate to share his roof with the wounded Indian, if need be.

And besides—Frank Hyde took the mysteries of that strange period to himself, as *his own*—which it was his special duty to unravel. And he hoped to turn this adventure of the Indian to some possible use in furthering his purpose.

Meantime, one of those events occurred which occasionally startle the quiet of all new settlements in forest-grown regions, and for a time it seemed as if the great mystery of the hour was forgotten.

The wedding between Frank Hyde and the maiden of his love was appointed for the Friday evening next following, and great preparations were being made for a general jollification on the occasion of the long-expected event. For the great popularity of Frank Hyde in the settlement was not more marked in its way, than was the love and esteem in which Molly Brayton was held.

Mr. Brayton, her father, was one of the oldest settlers. His family consisted of himself, wife and two children; for Molly had a little brother Willie—a fine, intelligent lad of five or six years.

On the Thursday afternoon before the day of the approaching nuptials, Mr. Brayton started out on a visit to a friend who lived a mile back of the settlement, in the woods. He did not notice that little Willie followed him as he entered the wood; and it was not until his return in the evening that the child was missed. Mr. Brayton had supposed, up to that moment, that the boy was at home; and when he found that his wife in her turn had supposed Willie was with

his father, their anxiety became intense. The alarm was instantly given, and a band of a dozen men set out in the night to scour the forest. All night long they hunted hither and thither, but without result, and returned to the settlement in the morning, hoping the child had found his own way home. But no—nothing had been seen of him.

The fears of the tortured mother now became very great, and all sorts of visions of horror, and pictures of her boy torn to pieces by wolves or panthers, presented themselves to her anguished mind. Soon reports began to be circulated that a panther had been seen in the wood near the settlement, and the alarm for the safety of the lost child pervaded all hearts. A messenger was dispatched on horseback to the nearest settlement in the vicinity, some twelve miles away, and he returned with almost the entire populace of that place. By three o'clock in the afternoon of Friday, an army of nearly two hundred men had gathered on the great square in front of the tavern, and systematic preparations were made for a thorough search.

The little army were provided with horns and guns, and formed in a line a mile long. Marching out thus all abreast, they silently searched every foot of the ground they passed over. Having proceeded thus a given distance, the army wheeled about and took another course. It had been calculated that by this thorough plan they would finally have searched every foot of the country for several miles around.

Perfect silence was enjoined upon all, and so moving in the utmost quiet, the little band proceeded for hours with their search. If the boy were found dead, by any portion of the line, a single gun was to be fired, to announce the result. If found alive, every man was to fire his piece, and blow his horn.

In the village, not a man was left behind. All business was suspended, and the women gathered in clusters in each other's houses, awaiting the result with anxious hearts. For the time, Willie Brayton was the child of every mother in the settlement; but of course, none of them really felt the pain of the long suspense so keenly as Mrs. Brayton, the boy's mother, and Molly, his sister.

The darkness fell down upon the sorrowing settlement, and still no sound had broken the silence of the long hours. The women, grown still more anxious, gathered in groups out of doors, listening in vague fear for the signal.

Hark! a gun sounded! Is he dead? was the question now. But a moment after

the wood resounded with the peals of the merry horns, and the crack of gun after gun followed.

"He is saved!" cried the women, in a chorus of joy.

Under the impulse of her gladness at the tidings, Molly Brayton rushed instantly forward toward the sound of the first gun, and disappeared in the edge of the wood. That moment a shriek was heard rising high above the clamor of the horns, but it was not repeated.

Willie Brayton had been found by our friend, Jo Ransom. He was sitting on an elevation in the middle of the swamp, completely surrounded by shallow water. He was half famished, and at first shrunk away from his discoverer as if afraid of him. But Jo drew from his pocket an apple which he had, and Willie grasped it eagerly, and ate it without more fear.

Great was the rejoicing over the lost lamb when he appeared in the village again. It was still early in the evening, and though the wedding had been of course postponed under the excitement of the hour, it was now resolved to proceed with it at once.

"We'll have the liveliest time ever seen in this section, I reckon!" said Jo Ransom.

"But where's Molly?" said some one.

"Molly!" cried Frank Hyde, looking about him, with a laughing face, "you're wanted."

But Molly could nowhere be found.

"The minx!" said Mrs. Brayton, "I do believe she's hid. She wants you to hunt her up now, I guess, Frank."

"I'll find her, quick enough!" said the expectant bridegroom, and left the room to search for her.

He looked everywhere, that he could conceive would be chosen by his affianced as a hiding-place. He called her name again and again, but no answer was returned.

"This is very strange," said he; "'tisin't like Molly at all, to hide herself in this way, just to frighten us."

He returned to the house with the tidings that Molly was nowhere to be found.

Then some of the women bethought themselves how the girl had run forward into the edge of the wood, and one or two persisted that they had heard a scream just afterward.

No pen can paint the feelings of the devoted lover's breast as gradually there dawned upon him the fearful certainty that his darling was lost. But how had she disappeared? That was the mystery. Turning the question over and over in his mind, his thoughts touched in passing on that other mystery, the strange initials, and the

Hunter of Night Island. But he did not dare to connect the two in his mind.

Again the weary line of march was formed, not a man of the whole army declining to serve. With such provisions as they could conveniently bestow about their persons taken to sustain them, they sallied forth, and all the long night they trod the country over.

As before, not a foot of land was omitted in any direction. Up the river and down the river for miles, and back of the settlement for miles that way, they tramped along, but no gun broke the stillness of the night, no horn resounded through the wood.

They passed over the very mouth of the great cave leading to the Indian chamber of the dead, but they were all unconscious that the rock in the deep bushes could lead them underground, if but once rolled away. Nor did their thoughts respecting the lost one turn underground at all.

"If the girl is anywhere on the surface of the earth," said one of the leaders of the searching party the next morning when they met for consultation at the settlement, "she's too far away to be within our reach, that's plain."

"Now, come to think," said Jo Ransom, "mightn't it be possible that she *ain't* on the surface of the earth?"

"You don't think she can be in any of the caves?" said another.

"Why not? We've searched the surface of the earth an' she ain't on it. But every man that ever explored the banks of the Kahuahgo knows that there's a terrible stretch of country under the earth's surface hereabouts."

"You're right," said Frank Hyde, with sudden determination. "We should be fools to search for a lost jewel on all the shelves of a closet, and never look into the drawers. How many of these good and true men are going to serve with me?"

There was no lack of volunteers. A hundred men were ready to follow wherever he should lead. But he selected only twenty of the best.

"Return to your homes, kind friends," said he; "you have done all you can, and you know how much I thank you—how much we all do. But for the caves, twenty men are amply sufficient."

In a very brief space of time they were ready.

"To the Black Cave first!" said Frank, with a shudder. "We'll face the harshest possibility in the beginning. If she has not fallen in that hideous hole there may be hope yet."

The Black Cave, it will be remembered, was near by. They reached it quickly.

"Frank," said Jo Ransom, "I'm going to hold your rope myself. Who's going down with ye?"

If the truth could have been known, Jo Ransom would not have entered that dark gulf for untold wealth. Since that fatal night, his horror for the Black Cave had been deep and strong, and the recent mysterious events had only deepened their feeling.

"Whoever likes," said Frank, mournfully, and a few minutes later, with one of the twenty, he descended into the slippery passage down to the foot.

The skeleton was gone! The torches, the two men bore, flared on the black walls and about the solid room, on a scene of emptiness. Nor was the lost girl there.

But Hyde's astonishment at the absence of the skeleton was measureless. Who had taken it away? How had it disappeared? Eagerly he walked about the circumference of the gloomy chamber, throwing the blaze of his torch upon every inch of the wall, seeking for some possible outlet. There was none whatever. Incredulously he looked up the steep and slimy passage-way that led to the light above. Equally impossible was it for human being to surmount that dizzy, slippery path.

But, lo! on the wall of the cave, chiseled into the solid rock, he saw again those fatal initials—*M. H.* Was he doomed to be haunted by these cabalistic initials forever?

The men were drawn out again; and in answer to the interrogatories of those above, Frank shook his head in silence.

But as they turned to go away, the other man who had been down, whispered in Jo Ransom's ear the discoveries they had made below. Ransom turned ghastly pale, but uttered no word.

To the Ice Cave, now, they proceeded with a rapid pace. It lay about a mile away, down the river, below the lower falls.

Lighting their torches, the whole body of men entered the cave together. A heavy mist rolled from the mouth, which opened directly on the water, and was reachable from above by climbing down a flight of natural steps in the rocky shore. It was almost impossible to penetrate, for the passage was obstructed with masses of ice, and the atmosphere within was like a keen winter's day.

"No one could live an hour here," muttered Ransom, as they entered.

Nevertheless, they had resolved to look everywhere, where man or beast could go, and they penetrated to the extreme limit of the cave—a distance of some five hundred feet.

Next to the caves in the wood, a mile

further down the stream, the tireless seekers for the lost proceeded. In the depths of the forest, they came to a sunken place, around which were the mouths of five caverns, leading underground, and communicating by innumerable passages. It was necessary to use some caution here, in order to explore the caves thoroughly, and prevent any of the party from becoming lost in the winding ways. The openings were all of them small—barely admitting the passage of a man—but they widened into lofty and spacious halls, through which the search was faithfully conducted, till every rod was explored.

"Still no trace—not the slightest clue!" cried Frank Hyde, as the party stood again in the open wood. "We must try the caves above the fall. They are our last hope."

It was now noon, and in repassing the settlement on their way up-stream, they inquired if perchance the lost girl had been heard from.

No, not a word.

The caves they now sought above the falls were of great extent and variety. They had several mouths, but their passages united under the earth, and while they were known by various names, they were really but one vast series of subterranean apartments.

They entered the mouth of the Cave of Rooms, and soon stood in a chamber some twenty feet below the surface of the earth. By the light of their blazing torches they could see the avenues branching out in various directions. Here they made preparations to separate into groups of three, leaving one man in the grand chamber on guard. One of each group then took a roll of stout homespun yarn in his hand, and gave the end of the line into the hands of the man in the grand chamber. This precaution was necessary, in order to enable them to find their way back from out the labyrinthine depths, if they should fail to reach any of the other openings. They had little fear, for the cave had been pretty thoroughly explored before; but it was well to be prepared for accident.

Frank Hyde's group (consisting of Ransom, Donnel and himself) took the avenue leading into the Cave of the Altar, whose opening was in the depths of the forest, only a few feet from the entrance to the sacred Indian cave. But of this latter cave, with its hidden opening, as we have already mentioned, they knew nothing whatever.

They passed on through the winding corridors, their torches casting a lurid glare about their immediate vicinity, but leaving only denser darkness behind and before. The scene was picturesque in the highest

degree. Curtains and drapery of limestone drooped from the ceiling or descended in graceful curves at the side. Sometimes the walls were of a dazzling whiteness, that reflected the torchlights till the avenue was one blaze of brilliancy. A huge table of rock, of snowy whiteness, and of a soft, friable quality, greeted them after they had walked some distance, and they knew from this that they had now reached the Cave of the Altar, and could not be far from the outlet. At this point the avenue began to be broken up by clusters of huge pillars, formed by masses of white rock, depending from the roof of the cave and joining with others on the floor, and as their torches cast their uncertain light on before, Hyde laid his arm on Jo Ransom's shoulder hastily.

"Hist!" he whispered, "do you see nothing?"

"No; what is't?"

"I saw a man's form moving among those pillars, or I am growing crazy. There!" pointing eagerly ahead; "do you see?"

Yes, they saw! There was a dusky figure moving about; but whether that of a man or a wild animal, they could not be so positive. They were not long in doubt, however, for a heavy stone came crashing among them, and at the same moment a loud, sneering laugh rung along the corridor.

"Hurroo!" cried Pat Donnel, in an outburst of excitement; "hurroo! Come on, b'ys!" and he plunged ahead furiously. The others were outstripped, for the instant, by the enthusiastic Pat; but a moment after they heard a great splash, and instantly the Irishman's torch was extinguished.

"Blood an' ouns!" roared Donnel, "get me out o' this! Howly Mother! I'm dhrowned!"

He had stumbled headlong into a shallow well that lay in his path; he was not hurt, however, and scrambled out safe, but dripping.

The pursuers troubled themselves little over this. They could still catch glimpses of the dusky figure before them, and they followed it eagerly. Knowing their location well, now, they had dropped the line of yarn. Presently the light of the entrance to the cave glimmered in the distance, and as they drew nearer, they beheld against the bright background, in strong relief, the retreating figure they sought to overtake. It was that of a man in ragged garments, and with long hair; but more they could not see, as his face was turned from them in his flight.

At last the opening was gained; they were close upon the fugitive, and must over-

take him the instant they had a fair run above ground. For this reason, they did not fire upon him. But what was their consternation, when they emerged into the light of day and glanced swiftly about them, to find that the man was nowhere to be seen. They beat about in the bushes hurriedly for a few minutes, confident that he must be somewhere near by; and by this means they obliterated whatever trail he might have left for them. They did not relax the vigor of the search, however, until the sudden fall of the night told them that it was in vain. And returning to the mouth of the Cave of Rooms, they met the other members of their party and returned, almost disheartened, to the village!

No tidings of the lost girl there. The mystery grew deeper and deeper.

CHAPTER V.

The Phantom on the Island.

JO RANSOM and Pat Donnel occupied a cabin at the settlement in company with two other young settlers like themselves, and the four kept bachelor's hall in roistering style.

On the night of the day when the caves were searched, the spectator who had peered in the windows of the bachelors' cabin would have beheld Mr. Donnel, stripped of his pantaloons, coat, boots, and every thing in the shape of wearing apparel, save a single garment, which gave him a decidedly cool and picturesque appearance. He stood with his back to the blazing fire which burned in the open fire-place with its stone hearth on a level with the cabin floor, drying his only article of apparel on his back, while the other appointments of his usual costume hung upon a chair near by. Cheered by the grateful warmth in the rear, Mr. Donnel was rehearsing to his comrades the wonderful adventures of the day, including his tumble into the well.

"Bedad," said he, "if it hadn't 'a been that I was so ayger fer to git me hands on th' murtherin' thaif, I should ha' lost me life as sure as me mother was a Dublin man. Fer av I had been walkin' whin I dhropped intil th' well, faix I'd wint to th' bottom like a cannon-ball. But, ye see, I was runnin' that fast that I struck clane on the other side th' pool, and so me valuable life was saved. But that was th' reward o' me bravery, sure. Musha thin, lads, it's the plucky hayrt that wins through, an' that's troth!"

"Oh, quit that blatherin', Pat!" said Ransom; "you were so scairt you couldn't stand still. No wonder you run! Here, pull off my boot."

The willing Irishman grasped the boot; but it was not so easy a matter to get it off. The water in the caves had wet the leather completely, and the boot stuck to the foot fast as the skin. Paddy wrenched and twisted in vain, and finally he put one of his own naked feet against Jo's chair, and, bracing stiffly, gave a furious pull. The boot came off very unexpectedly, and Pat fell backward into the fire-place on a bed of hot coal. For a few minutes there was music and dancing in the cabin.

"Och! Mother o' Moses!" shrieked Pat, "I'm murdered! Oh! Blood an' ouns! I'm broiled without bastin'."

And whirling wildly about, he finally sat himself down in a pail of drinking-water that stood in a corner of the room. This brought relief, though he moaned dismally, while his friends moaned in company with him, though from very different feelings, for *their* moans were the dying sounds of the peals of laughter with which they had been making the little cabin ring, as they witnessed Pat's antics.

The Irishman was not very severely burned, however, and it was not long before the group were restored to their former condition of quiet.

The conversation soon turned on the recent mysterious events, as a matter of course, and from the discussion of the local mystery, it naturally turned upon mysterious things generally.

"Did I ever tell yes, boys, about the ghost me fayther saw in the ould country?" asked Pat.

"No," said Zeke Melton, one of the four. "I never knowed ye had a father. Le's hear it."

"Well, ye must know me fayther lived in Ballykilly. That's a nate little village in the South of Ireland, not many miles from the Lakes of Killarney. Ye've heard o' *thim*."

"Can't say's ever I did," said Zeke.

"Arrah, ye omadhaun, where have ye been hidin' all yer life, that ye niver heard o' the Lakes o' Killarney—the swatest picthurs o' wather this side o' Paradise. But that's little to do wid me shtory, so I've it be!

"Wan day me fayther had been to a race at Baughskerry, that's beyant, maybe tin mile or so from Ballykilly, on the road to Cork, an' he had fell in wid a lot o' roarin' boys from the back counthry, an' a slashin' time they had had of it all together, wid dhrinkin' an' fightin' an' other ginteel divarsons, an' fer consequence ye may consave that me fayther stepped high an' felt gayly whin night came an' he shtarted for home.

"Well, he walked along his way wid a light hayrt, twirlin' his shillaleh an' howlin' quietly to himself to the tune o' 'The Night before Larry was Stretched;' an' wid walkin' on both sides o' the road to wanst—a notion he had whin he got frisky ye mind—he got over the road but slowly, an' it was midnight whin he kem to the stretch of wood, beyant Ballykilly about two mile. He was walkin' along as bould as a lion, whin to a sudden he heard a quare noise that sounded like a groan whispered like, an' made his hair rise a bit, though he swore he wasn't frighted at all, not he!

"'What's that?' said me fayther. But he got no answer. Ivery thing was so still ye could a' heard his heart a-thumpin' in his waistcoat.

"'Who are ye, ye bloody villian?' cried me fayther at the top of his voice. 'Come out o' that, now!' says he, shpittin' on his fist and crackin' his heel wid his shillaleh.

"But niver a word to answer came up.

"'Arrah, thin, whoever ye are,' says me fayther, 'ye betther kape low or I'll welt ye wid me shtick till ye can't see out o' yer two eyes, as sure as me mother's name was Barney Donnel. Hoo! Come out o' that, now, if yer a man!'

"Shtill niver a word did the answer come to him, an' wid that me fayther thinks he was dhramin' perhaps, an' had heard nothin' after all, or maybe it wor the whiskey at the race that had got into his head an' was bodderin' him. So wid that he shtarted off ag'in, singin' the 'Bould Soldier Boy,' wid a bit of lung that made the ould woods ring again wid it.

"But no sooner had he put his fut for home whin he heard the bastely noise ag'in, an' this time he knowed it wasn't the whiskey fer sure.

"'Hurroo!' says me fayther, jumpin' up an' kickin' his two heels together, 'ye're there ag'in, air ye?'

"But bedad afore he could put two words to that there kem a blow in his face that knocked him flat, an' a voice cried out in hollow tones, 'Rise, Michael Donnel, and behold yer gran'fayther's shpirit!'

"Wid that me fayther turned about, an' lookin' up there shtood behind him a ghost tin yards high, all in white, an' wid two great red eyes all on fire an' glowin' like wan o' thim coals that I sot down on a while ago, bad 'cess to 'em. Whin he said that, ye may be sure me fayther got sober in a twinklin'. The whiskey went out of his head in no time, an' left him as sober as an owl in the early mornin'. So down on his marrybones me fayther dropped, an' began to say his prayers as fast as he

could fer the chatterin' of his teeth in his head.

"'Quit that, ye gossoon!' says the ghost, 'I'm not a praste. Git off yer knees an' shtand on yer two legs like a Donnel born. What wud ye muddy yer corduroys fer, an' nobody by to hurt ye but yer gran'fayther?'

"Wid that ye know me fayther plucked up his courage again, fer he knowed the shpirit meant no harrum to him whin he shpoke like that.

"'Arrah,' says me father, 'ye'll excuse me fer bein' frighted a bit; ye see I didn't recognize ye at first. Ye've changed a dale s'nce ye wor buried in the churchyard at Ballykilly.'

"'Ye're right,' says the ghost. 'It's a great counthry fer changin' a man's luka, that I kem from.'

"'An' how is things in 'tother world?' says me fayther, growin' boulder every minute as he see the shpirit was inclined to be sociable wid him. 'An' is me gran'mother hearty over there?'

"'I know not how yer gran'mother is,' says the ghost; 'she don't live where I do. I haven't seen her since the night I died.'

"'D'ye say so?' said my fayther. 'An' where might it be now, this place yer sphakin' of—this place where ye live? I'm hopin' it's agreeable livin' theyre.'

"'That it's not,' says the ghost; 'that it's not—as ye'll find whin ye go theyre yerself. Faix, yer on the road!'

"Me fayther was struck a bit back be that, d'ye mind, for he knowed there wor but one place that the ghost would shpake of in thim terms. But to make sure of it he put another question, wid his teeth bodderin' a thrife at the time.

"'Musha, thin,' says me fayther, 'I'm hopin' it's cool weather where ye live, for if I'm goin' there meself I'd not be favorable to it if it's a warm counthry, ye mind.'

"'Warm?' says the ghost. 'Warm is it? Bedad, ye may think it's warm. It's hot, ye spalpeen—bilin' an' roastin' an' fryin' hot from wan day's ind to another. Oh, ye'll fale the comfort of it whin ye come to thry it.'

"'Wurra! wurra!' cried me dad at that, 'what is yer rayson for thinkin' I'll be goin' there at all? Sure I'm rigular at the church, an' the praste has no call to talk to me this way. I'm thinkin' ye're hard on me, grandad, or is it jokin' ye air? Say ye're jokin' now, an' I've me to go home in p'ace to Molly. She'll be lukkin' for me the while an' it's comin' on late.'

"'Wud ye prate to me about yer Molly?' says the ghost. 'What's yer Molly, ye gossoon, to the rest of yer immortal aowl? Sure you don't see me that often that ye need be in a hurry to l'ave me.'

"'No,' says me fayther, 'that's true; but I was hopin' now ye'd found the way to me ye'd be callin' often, ye see; though faith ye'd not be plisint company to me friends, I'm thinkin'."

"'No matter,' says the shpirit, 'it's all wan. Ye'll see me no more after to-night. I've got pertickler permission to visit ye the night, and warn ye, but it's not able I'll be to l'ave home ag'in."

"'Ah, that's it?' says me fayther.

"'Ay, it is,' says the ghost.

"'An' what can I do to pl'ase ye?' says me fayther.

"'Have ye any money?' says the ghost.

"'Arrah,' says me fayther, 'I've a thri-
le that I won at the races, doublin' an'
more what I took from home this mornin'."

"'How much have ye?' says the ghost,
an' me fayther tould him to a farthin'.

"'L'ave it me,' says the ghost.

"'What for?' says me fayther.

"'For the rest of yer sowl!' says the ghost.

"'Arrah,' says me fayther, 'if I'm goin' to that hot country ye shpake of, what'll it matther?"

"'Bad 'cess to ye,' says the ghost, 'that's what I want the money fer. It's tryin' I am to get ye off, an' if ye'll do as I bid ye, ye may be saved after all."

"'An' what might that be?' says my fayther.

"'Well, in the first place,' says the ghost, 'ye'll l'ave off gettin' dhrunk ivery week as ye do now."

"'I'll do it,' says me father.

"'In the next place, ye must bide more at home wid yer old woman an' not be wasthin' yer time wid ructions and fairs an' races and wakes."

"'Good ag'in,' says me fayther, 'I believe ye."

"'In the next place, ye'll empty yer pockets on the ground here, an' go home as fast as ye can thraavel. I'll take the money down to the place I kem from, an' buy a rel'ase, sure."

"'An' what does Ould Nick want wid me money?' says me fayther; 'sure it's no good to him, I'm thinkin'."

"'Arrah,' says the ghost, 'don't bodder me, ye spalpeen. Ould Nick loves money betther than any thing goin'. He's fonder of it than ye think. Give it me."

"'Bad luck to ye,' says me fayther, 'I belave it's foolin' me ye air. If ye want me money, ye ould thafe ye, ye'll git it, fer deuce a wan'll I give it ye?"

"'An' wid that he up wid his shtick an' flung it wid all the power of his arm shtaight at the ghost's head, an' bedad it went through it like it was only moonshine,

an' me fayther took to his heels an' run wid all his might, yelling bloody murther at the top of his voice, till ye might have thought he was in th' wilderness here wid a pack o' wolves after him instead o' bein' in the purtiest land under the sun, wid nothin' but his gran'fayther's ghost a throublin' him.

"But, bedad, it was small use runnin', an' that me dad diskivered moighty quick, an' yellin' was no betther, be the same token; fer, as sure as I'm his son alive the day to tell of it, me fayther was caught up in the air like a bit o' thistle-down, an' before he knowed it, begor, he was lyin' on his back, in Dennis Flaherty's pig-pen at Ballykilly, an' the pigs a-rubbin' his clane face wid their dirty snouts; and begor, as me fayther luk'd upward, faix, the hivins was wan stretch o' red an' blue fire, an' his gran'fayther's ghost was flyin' aff toward sunrise wid his head downward an' his long gound a sht'amin' up to the skies twinty mile high an' more. So thin me fayther put his hand in his pocket an' I'm lyin' if his money wasn't all gone—ivery shillin' of it; an' so he faynted away, an' faix we found him in the pig-pen in the mornin' wid his arm around wan of the pigs that he was callin' 'Molly dear, acushla!' fer ye see he had a notion it was me mother, an' him at home shlapin' in his bed.

"Well, whin we tuck him home an' set him by the fire, he was a long while comin' to, fer sure his wits was nearly gone wid what he'd been through, an' no wondher. But by an' by he kem out of his daze, an' thin he towld us the shtory; an' it was aisy seen it wor all true, for sure enough he'd not a pinny o' money about him, an' his body was black an' blue wid the hard thratement he'd had; an' when he towld about the ghost l'avin' him in Dennis Flaherty's pig-pen it left no bit o' doubt on any sinsible mind, fer in the pig-pen we'd found him sure enough, an' wasn't that proof fit fer a coort wid tin jidges all in bag-wigs?"

"Wud ye belave after all that, there was thim in the village—bad 'cess to 'em—who indivored to put a bad construction on me fayther's adventures, an' said that he kim home dhrunk afther shpreedin' away all his money at the races, an' crawled into Dennis Flaherty's pig-pen in his intoxicashin, an' made up the whole shtory about the ghost of his gran'fayther, jist to bamboozle me mother, fer d'ye mind Mistress Donnel had a bit of a tongue o' her own, an' be the same token she could handle a broomstick wid the best in Ballykilly; but to prove his shtory throe, faix, me fayther gev up goin' to races, an' fightin', an' hard dhrinkin' from that day on. He shtayed home wid me

mother a good half o' his time, an' saved his airnins, an' whin he got dhrunk he'd do it in a quiet, dacent, family way, in his own cabin—an' that no oftener than wan time in a month or more. Arrah, it reformed him quite, an' in a year from the night he saw his gran'fayther's ghost, faix, he was on his way to Ameriky, wid me mother an' me own silf along."

"Wal," said Jo Ransom, at the conclusion of this narrative, "that's a good enough ghost-story, I s'pose, for Ireland; but this yere country's another thing. Besides, that's only yer dad's story, arter all. I've see'd many a man that knew somebody as had see'd a ghost, but I never see'd one myself, nor knowed anybody that had."

"Arrah, ye spalpeen," said Pat, "ye're a hayrdchap to suit; an' ghosts an' shpirits a-showin' their signs to ye aven now."

"What d'ye mean?" said Jo, in an irritated tone; "ther' ain't no ghosts round here, is they? Whar' be they? Who's seen 'em? I hain't!"

"Mabbe ye've not, Misther Jo, an' yit ye've seen their signs I'm thinkin'. An' what else is them bullets wid the mairks on 'em—the wan in the tree, an' the wan in Bartlett's arm? An' what else is the mairks on th' ould Injin's forrid? Answer me that, now?"

"Pshaw!" cried Jo.

"Arrah, thin, me boy, ye may say *pañaw*, an' ye may say *shoo!* but ye'll not scare away the mystery, I'm thinkin'. An' if ye're so moighty incredulous, I'll tell ye more, that I'm not so aisy in me mind about that same Injin, yit! If I was to say that I've half o' an idaya that the ould Injin himself is in the saycret, an' knows more nor he'll tell, it's jist what the truth 'ud be."

"Augh, you can talk!" said Jo, contemptuously; "ef yer know so much, why don't ye cl'ar up the business right along?"

"Well," said Pat, "it's my belief that there's wan way of accountin' fer iverything along; and that is, that Matt Hinds' shpirit is workin'. Luk, now," he went on, in the argumentative style, for which he was famous; "in the first place he's dead, that's sure—fer I sah he's skileton, an' Misther Frank wid me; he's dead, an' the first thing he diz is to carry aff his own bones. He cudn't do that av he was livin', cud he?"

"Not 'less his flesh was onto 'em," said one of the listeners, drily.

"Whisht! L'ave me go on wid me argyment," said Pat; "he's dead. The next thing he diz is t' light on the island an' fire the shot ye saw, an' t' haunt th' wood be daylight where he shot John Bartlett and marked the Injin."

"Whar' d' he git his rifle?" queried Jo.

"Arrah, mabouchal, where wud a shpirt git it? Hould yer whisht! Thin he puts Willie Brayton in the swamp, an' while we're huntin' fer him he stales the swatest girl in th' settlement, an' be the same token she's dead herself before this. He wudn't kill his inimies till he broke they're hairts wid killin' their pride an' jewel first. That's his bloody vingeance, the baste. Ye'll hear worse from him before ye hear betther, an' av ye don't, I'll cut me own throat, an' be-queath ye me back teeth fer a charm ag'inat him, fair."

At this moment, Jo Ransom, who had been walking uneasily about the room, stopped before the window, and looked out into the night. A bright moon was shining, and his eyes naturally turned themselves toward Night Island.

"All is over!" he cried, in an accent of terror; "boys! Here! See that!"

They crowded about the window, and looked out. On the opposite bank of the island, they beheld a white figure, waving its arms up and down, as if to attract the notice of people in the settlement.

"I tould ye!" whispered Pat Donnel; "it's her ghost! I tould ye! Poor gerl! poor crayther!"

While they still gazed the figure vanished abruptly. The men drew a long breath. Jo Ransom sat down and began to pull on his boots.

"Whar' ye goin', Jo?"

"I'm agoin' fer Frank Hyde," said Jo, and out he went.

Great was the wonderment of Hyde as he heard the statement of his friend. Not being of a superstitious turn of mind himself, however, he believed that his friend had been the victim of some hallucination. But the fact that the three other men had seen the apparition as plainly as himself, was a proof that such was not the case. He went out with his friend, in the hope that he might see the strange object himself, but in vain; though they watched the island till a late hour in the night, no more was seen of it.

Next day the searching party met again to pursue its hopeless task. They returned to the mouth of the cave of the Altar, where the mysterious person of the previous night had been seen. With a faint hope that something might result from it, they resolved to enter the Cave again, first stationing two of their number—one of whom was Pat Donnel—at the entrance, to intercept him if the man should be unearthed again, and come out that way.

They found nothing, though they searched far and wide among the rambling avenues; and on their return they found the

two guards gone from the entrance. While still wondering what this could mean, the men returned, breathless and panting. They reported that, while patiently watching the outlet, and talking with each other, they heard a loud "Ha! ha! ha!" in the bushes, seemingly close by where they stood.

"I put for it like a streak," said Pat Donnel, "wid Jack here close at me heels; an' be the hill o' Howth, boys, though we bate about in the thicket fer a half-hour, not a sign could we see at all, at all."

"Strange," said Hyde, musingly. "Show us the place."

"Bedad, that's not so aisy now, Misther Frank," said Pat; "we hardly knew the way it kem exactly whin we heard it; an' now, wid knockin' around like a wild man me wits is turned till I cudn't point ye out the shpot to save me sowl from roastin'."

"This passes conjecture," said the agonized Frank, whose plain common-sense judgment seemed to be put quite at fault by the events which were happening in such seemingly impossible ways about him.

"Misther Frank," said Pat Donnel, with a very sober face, "I'm truly sorry fer ye, sir, as we all are; but, it's the conviction o' me soul that ye're wastin' yer inergies. I've tould ye, an' I tell ye over, it's the shpirt o' Matt Hinds that's tormentin' us, an' where's the sinse in compatin' wid a shpirt?"

"Confusion to your prating tongue!" cried Frank, in agony; "if Matt Hinds has to do with these mysteries, Matt Hinds is alive. Whoever has stolen my betrothed, has stolen her with an arm of flesh and blood, and I will find her if I grow gray in the search."

"Hurroo!" cried the excitable Pat, "av ye talk that way, Misther Frank, I'm wid ye. Av Matt Hinds is alive it's a different matter, sure. An' whether or no he is, if any man wid flesh an' blood a rowlin' in his bones, has stole the swate crayther, I've a piece o' fat in the heel o' me fist fer th' thafe, meself. Show me the baste—show me th' nose atween his two eyes—hoo!" and Pat jumped up and cracked his heels together with a will.

That night the apparition was seen again on the island, waving its arms in the air. The whole settlement turned out to gaze at the spectacle. Some among them, whose ears were particularly keen, thought they heard a faint cry above the roar of the waters, but they could not be certain. It was but for a moment, and then the figure vanished.

Again on the following night the white figure appeared; and as the wondering set-

tlers gazed that way there suddenly flashed up the light of a torch, which threw its glare full in the face of the apparition, and exhibited the wan and mournful features of Molly Brayton!

She stood on the edge of the black cliff overlooking the river. She wore the same dress, of some white and fleecy texture, that she had worn that evening when she disappeared—her wedding-dress that was to have been. She evidently was crying at the loudest reach of her woman's voice, but she could not be understood, if, indeed, she uttered any words.

But there was another figure at her side: that of a ragged, haggard man, with long, shaggy hair and beard, who danced madly up and down, and seemed to be urging her to cry louder. At last, while the gaze of all was riveted that way, he raised his fist and struck her in the face. She fell to the ground, and, hurling his still burning torch into the roaring gulf below, he dragged her away—out of sight.

It seemed as if Frank Hyde, as he gazed on this fearful scene, had lost the power of motion. He stood rigidly still; he uttered no word; and only when he saw the arm descend and strike his darling to the ground, he uttered one spasmodic cry, that seemed like the sudden groan of a heart whose pain was almost unbearable.

That night he tossed in sleepless agony, through the long hours, on his bed; and at the earliest break of the day he was once more gathering his staunch friends about him.

"There is but one way," said he, "we must go to that island."

"Boy," said an aged settler, who had joined the group, "you talk of an impossibility. That island never can be reached by living being. Say what you will about the folly of believing in specters, I tell you that no human being ever reached Night Island alive. Twice I have seen the effort made; and both times I saw the rash adventurers swept over the brink of that cataract into the boiling caldron beneath, and their torn and mangled bodies were drawn from the river, miles below. Do not speak of attempting the impossible. You nor any other man that lives, can reach that spot. It is death to attempt it—CERTAIN DEATH. Heed my words, Frank. I love ye, boy, and I would not see your poor corpse boiling in that gulf of foam. Never, till man has learned to fly like a bird, can he set foot on Night Island."

"Frank Hyde is as crazy as a loon!" said one settler to his wife, at dinner that day.

"Why, what makes you say that?" asked the woman.

"'Cause he is. It's as onpossible to git him to hear to reason as ef—wal, he won't do it, nohow. He's sot ag'inst the hull on us 'cause we b'leve the evidence of our eyes. He says we ain't seen no sperit on' Night Island at all."

"The land! Why, *everybody* see'd it."

"He says the hull village is bewitched. Lord bless his poor heart it's nobody but himself a-losin' his wits with sorrow. He sw'ars he'll go to that island *some way*. Old uncle Corlis talked to him like a father—told him he'd hav' to l'arn how to fly first. Darned ef it done a bit o' good. He's cracked, sure 'nough, poor boy."

That was the way all the settlers looked at it. Frank tried in vain to get them to devise a plan with him of reaching the island. They scouted the idea.

Frank dined at Mr. Brayton's that day. He was a little pale, but quite calm and collected.

"I adhere to common sense, Mr. Brayton," said he. "Talk not to me old womens' tales about ghosts and hobgoblins. I *will* not be fooled by such nonsense, while Molly is on that island at the mercy of some unknown and mysterious ruffian. The fact that she *is* there is proof enough to me that there is some way of getting there, however full of peril it may be. I mean to discover it, and whatever it may be, attempt it. I *must*!"

"God bless you, Frank!" said Mr. Brayton. "I believe you are right, but I confess I am unable to comprehend this dreadful puzzle."

That afternoon, Frank spent his time on the bank of the river, scanning the situation with a determined eye. He was thoroughly resolved on reaching the island, by some means. That night his plan was matured, and the next morning he succeeded in inducing Pat Donnel to cross the river with him, some half a mile or so above the falls, to the opposite shore. After satisfying himself that the approach from that side was as hopeless as the other, the two returned at evening to the settlement side of the river again.

Gathering his friends once more about him, Frank laid the case before them.

"My friends," said he, "I know you believe Molly Brayton is dead. But I do not, and I can not. I ask you all to give me your aid in the effort I am going to make to reach the island."

"Frank," pleaded one of the group, "we feel for ye. You know we do. But Lord help you, lad, ye can't do that. Yer sure o' meetin' death if ye 'tempt it."

"Then, by Him who made me," said Frank, "I *will* meet it! As soon die in this enterprise as to die of grief. I would have laid down my life, as Heaven knows, to save that of the girl I loved; and I will *risk* that life, in the hope of saving her."

"Yer jest throwin' it away, Frank—jest throwin' it away."

"No, but listen to my plan."

And then he detailed the plan he had developed in his mind. It was simple enough, but it was still a fearful risk, and strong indeed must be the arm of the man who should attempt the fearful passage.

In the morning they made ready. Pat Donnel and John Bartlett—who had recovered from his illness now—entered a boat at a point above the falls that was considered safe to cross, and rowed swiftly away. One of them held in his hand a ball of stout twine, which they unrolled as they sped across, until, on reaching the opposite side of the river, they had stretched the cord from bank to bank, Frank Hyde holding the other end. With this cord they dragged across the river a second line, composed of several cords twisted together—which had been prepared the night before for the purpose. Then they succeeded in drawing over a strong rope. The whole resources of the settlement had been brought into play to construct this rope, and great indeed was the care that had been bestowed upon it; firmly were its several sections tied and bound together—for on its strength or weakness would hang life or death, indeed!

Now came the most difficult part of these preliminary arrangements, for the rope, being stretched from shore to shore, had to be carried down either bank till it should stretch across the river over the great fall, where it would touch the island. Slowly and carefully, it was borne along by the men on either side of the river; and you may imagine the difficulty of the enterprise when you know that it had to be kept constantly taut, or its middle part would sag into the swift current and no human arm could hold it. Besides, the shore was not as smooth as a city street by any means; there were jutting rocks, and overhanging trees, that had to be avoided. But all the necessities of the case had been carefully weighed beforehand, by the intrepid Frank; and at last the tedious feat was accomplished—the rope hung over the falls, some twenty feet above their current, the ends of the line being fastened, high up in the branches, to the trunk of a huge elm on either shore.

Frank Hyde had only directed these movements; he had not participated in

them, for he was determined to reserve all his strength for the fearful passage which he contemplated, hand over hand, along that rope to the island. It was marvelous how calm he seemed; and the most timid women in the settlement gathered hope for him, from the deliberation of his preparations. It was no rash or fool-hardy trial of his powers that he contemplated; he meant to *succeed*. And when all was ready he said:

"It's noon. I'll have a bite of something to eat before I start. I may be hungry after I get to the island, and there's no game there. I shan't want to load myself with much in the way of provisions."

"Shall you take your rifle?" said one.

"Certainly; I'll not leave my trusty companion behind. I may need her services."

After dinner, the people gathered again upon the bank, and presently the intrepid youth made his appearance. He wore nothing but his shirt and pantaloons. His feet and head were alike bare. His rifle was strapped securely on his back, as also was a small bundle of provisions.

"Good-by, mother," he said, turning to Mrs. Brayton; he had long called her by that name; "I'll bring your daughter to you as soon as I can."

"Not *that way*, Frank?" said the mother, pointing fearfully to the swaying rope.

"No," said he, "that won't be necessary, I think. *I'll bring her by the route she went!*"

There were many hearty hand-shakings, and in many an eye there was a moisture that needed no apology at that moment.

"God bless ye, lad," said old uncle Corlis, as he wrung his hand; "ye're a noble spirit! I admire your pluck, but I tremble for ye."

Frank climbed cheerfully into the branches of the huge elm, and ran lightly up to the place where the rope was joined to the trunk. With a wave of his hand, to those below, he seized the rope, and was ready to launch out.

"Hurroo! hould hard! Phillaloo! Hurroo! Mither Frank! Wait a bit! Hurroo!"

It was the voice of the excited Pat Donnel that broke on his ear; and the wild Irishman came rushing upon the scene, with his eyes as big as saucers.

"Mither Frank!" he cried, dancing about under the tree; "come down out o' that! I've news fer ye! The divil's caught! Come down, mabouchal, come down!"

Thrilled by the hope these words conveyed, Frank descended from the tree like a shot, and was instantly caught in the

arms of the enthusiastic Mr. Donnel, and hugged tempestuously.

"What is it, Pat?" said Frank, in eager tones.

"Oh, the heavens be yer bed, lad, he's caught! We have him in the wood, just by! Bartlett is wid'im. Hurroo! Come on!"

"Who's caught?" "Who is it?" cried a dozen voices.

"Ah, the devil's own," ejaculated Pat. "Who wud it be but the devil's own? Him! No less!" and, with a continued volley of hurroo's and ejaculations, Pat plunged into the wood, followed by the whole body of men, women and children.

CHAPTER VI

The Death Ride, and the New Hope.

AFTER securing their end of the rope firmly to the tree on the opposite side of the river, Bartlett and Donnel had moved up the bank of the river again, through the dense wood on that side. They had left their boat some distance above, in a place of safety, just by the bend in the stream, and, wishing to see their friend Frank once more before he started on his perilous trip, they made all haste to reach their boat again. They came to it in a very brief space of time, and were just about to push off, when Pat Donnel, who was in the boat, raised his hand to Bartlett and whispered: "Aisy, John! Hould her a minute!"

He scrambled out again, as quietly as possible, and, approaching his friend, laid his hand on his shoulder.

"What is it?" asked Bartlett.

"Whist!" said Pat. "D'ye see where me eyes is lukkin'? Watch that same now."

Following the direction of the Irishman's eyes, Bartlett fixed his own gaze upon a thicket across the stream, which grew close to the water's edge—or, rather, to the edge of the rocky shore, a foot or two above the water—and, a moment after, what was his surprise at beholding a man's head emerge from the bushes, and gaze cautiously down the stream, seemingly watching the preparations that were going forward below. The head was without artificial covering, but was provided with a shock of long, shaggy hair, and a beard of corresponding length.

The two men exchanged glances.

"D'ye know that face?" whispered Pat.

"I reckon I do," said Bartlett.

"That's no ghost, me lad."

"If 'tis," said Bartlett, "I'm an Injin."

"Be aisy, ye thafe," hissed Pat, apostrophizing the unconscious head, and shaking his fist at it; "we'll have ye now."

Dragging the boat carefully along the shore, till it was hidden from view by the bend of the river, they shot out, pulling up stream with might and main. They landed on the other side, in a sheltered cove, and, fastening their boat with all haste, seized their rifles and moved off, swiftly and quietly, into the wood. Cautiously, half-crouching, they drew near to the owner of the shaggy head, and it was not until they were close upon him that he seemed to be aware of their approach. Then he started up from his bending position in the bushes, from which he had been looking out, and gazed wildly around him.

Bartlett and Donnel instantly confronted him, with their weapons leveled. Quick as thought, the fellow raised his own gun, and fired.

"'Cess to ye," said Pat, as the ball whistled close to his head, "ye spoke too late."

"Surrender, Matt Hinds," said Bartlett. "If ye stir an inch, I'll put a bullet through ye."

The man scowled ferociously upon his captors, and seemed to realize that he was in a tight place. They closed upon him quickly, but he turned from them and shouted:

"Follow me, if you dare—ha! ha! ha!" and was about to spring over the bank into the swift current of the river.

"That I will," said Donnel, bounding upon him with a spring like a panther, and throwing him heavily to the ground. Bartlett threw down his gun, drew his knife in a twinkling, and sprung upon the man in his turn.

The struggle that ensued was a fearful one. The fellow seemed to have no more regard for the knives of his antagonists than if they were playthings. He rolled and plunged under the grasp of his captors, and actually seized the blade of Bartlett's knife with his teeth, and bit it as a dog would do. His aim seemed to be to get to the water's edge, and roll off into the stream, dragging his captors with him. But he had two men to deal with who were accustomed to rough sport; and, at last, when the man's legs were hanging over the very edge of the rock, they had pinioned his hands, tied a handkerchief tightly over his mouth, and dragged him back into the wood. Next, tying his feet and legs together, they stretched him out on the grass, and Bartlett sat down upon his breast, astride, facing the head of the vanquished ruffian, and gazing into his bloodshot eyes.

"Whew!" said he, as he wiped his reeking forehead with his hand, "that was a

hot job fer high noon. Be off, now, Pat."

"Can ye hould'im?" said Pat, giving a hitch to his leather trowsers, and settling himself in his disarranged clothes.

"I reckon! Scoot!"

Pat was off like a deer through the forest, and the way he rushed upon the scene at the settlement, the reader knows.

When the excited settlers, with Frank Hyde at their head, following Pat Donnel's lead, came to the scene of the conflict, words could not express their astonishment at beholding the dead alive.

"Matt Hinds!" uttered Hyde.

"No less!" said Pat. "The ghost is laid, sure."

"On his back!" said Bartlett, drily.

"You'll crush him, John," said Hyde, "sitting on him that way. Give him a chance to breathe."

"It's more'n he deserves, anyhow," said Bartlett, rising. "He's a devil, if thar' ever was one."

"Hinds," said Frank, bending over the prostrate man, "where did you come from?"

Hinds turned a fierce scowl upon his rival.

"From hell!" said he, between his teeth, "from hell!"

"Matt," said Hyde, "for God's sake be human. I swear to you I owe you no ill-will. You were mad when you struck me, and I'm as well as ever now. I'll promise you your life, gladly, if there's no stain but that on your hands. You need not fear me."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the man, with that unearthly, maniacal laugh they had heard before; "don't offer me life! What do I want life fer, but to work my vengeance with? Give me a knife, and cut my bonds, and I'll earn my supper out of this crowd, quicker!"

"Tell me, Hinds," said Frank, "did you carry off Molly Brayton?"

"Ay, I did!" roared the maniac—for such he was. "The Black Hunter of Night Island wanted her! He sent me for her, and I carried her to him in my arms."

"Devil, or man—I know not which to call you—tell me the secret path to that island."

Again the man laughed wildly.

"Tell me," cried Frank, "or I'll cut your throat where you lie. Speak!"

"Cut it! Then ye'll know, won't ye?" sneered the man.

Hyde bit his lip in silence. Suddenly, a wild light shot through the maniac's eyes.

"You promise me my life if I show you the way?" said he.

"Yes," gasped Frank, "if you show me the path you took to the island, and Molly is alive, I promise you your life. But, if you have slain her, I'll tear you limb from limb."

"Agreed," said the maniac. "Unbind me. I will go."

Bidding the women and children retire to a safe distance, a circle of men, with rifles leveled, gathered about the haggard fiend, and his bonds were cut. He sprang to his feet with a scream.

"*There lies my path!*" he shouted, pointing across the swift river. "*That is the road to Night Island. How many of yer cowardly souls 'll foller me?*"

"You lie, you devil!" cried Bartlett. "Ye never could git to Night Island by that route, an' ye never did."

The maniac turned upon him a scornful gaze.

"I lie, do I? It's easy proved, John Bartlett. Give me a boat, an' I'll take as many of ye over as dare go with me. Ha! ha! ye cowards, every dog of ye."

"Bartlett," said Hyde, "I can't stand this. Give him a boat, and let him go. If he can make that passage, so can I—and I will."

The man was guarded to the water's edge, and Bartlett's boat brought down from the cove where it lay. He sprang into it, with a loud laugh, and shot out into the current, standing erect in the little craft.

"Good God!" cried Frank, "he don't touch the oars!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the maniac, as he sped away, "git yer lady-love, if ye can, Frank Hyde! This is my route to her arms! I'll meet ye, to-night, in th' Injin Cave o' Bones!"

The scene that now presented itself would have made a thrilling picture for a painter's deft brush. The settlers lined the banks of the river, with white faces and staring eyes, looking, with one intent, upon the maniac, as he stood erect in the little boat, hallooing and waving his arms wildly. Onward he sped, in the swift current; he neared the edge of the giddy precipice of the fall; he reached the brink, and, with a wild scream, that lingered long in the ears of those who heard it, he disappeared in the boiling gulf below. A moment after, his body shot up from the foamy waters, straight as a pine, and, plunging forward, disappeared from sight.

Three days afterward, the mangled form was taken from the water, miles below, at another settlement, where the river widened and grew shallow.

It would be difficult to say whether this strange event made the mystery clearer, or

deepened it more hopelessly. The villagers, as they wended their way back in groups, discussed the puzzling question among themselves, with little satisfactory result. As usual, Mr. Donnel was ready with a line of convincing argument.

"Don't ye see, now," said Pat, grasping one of his forefingers with his other hand, for a guide and sustainer, "Matt Hinds niver has been dead at all, at all. It's as plain as the nose atween me two eyes. He got out o' the Black Cave—"

"But how could he?" asked Jo Ransom, with a perplexed look; "'tain't a possible thing, Pat."

"Arrah, now, what's possessin' ye to shpake loike that, an' him before yer two eyes the hour? How cud he? Faix, it's easy known! Somebody helped him out, that's plain."

"But who?" persisted Jo.

"The devil a care who! That's none o' me bizness! An' whin he got out, faix he pushed the man in, that helped him up. Bedad, it's loike him, the thafe! An' that was the skileton we sah. It's as clear as me two eyes."

"Yer a smart talker, Pat, I don't deny; yer orter be'n a lawyer. But yer idees don't git fur, to my notion. Whar's the gal? Kin ye answer that?"

Mr. Donnel's face grew sober in an instant.

"Ah, lad, I tould ye long ago; she's dead, an' her shpirit's on the island. I tould ye! Whin ye was talkin' yer stuff about Matt Hinds carryin' her off, didn't I tell ye yer mistake? Ye see now! Matt Hinds knows nothin' about the gerl. It's the Black Hunter tuk 'er!"

"D'ye mean t' say Matt Hinds hain't b'en on th' island along o' that gal? Didn't he shute a bullet with his mark on to it?"

"The Black Hunter, I tell ye," roared Pat; "av Matt Hinds knowed any way to th' island, why didn't he take it? Because he cudn't. He niver was thayer. Didn't we chase him out o' th' Cave o' th' Alther? Thayer's where he lived."

Mr. Donnel's speculations, like a good many other speculations that sound well, were no nearer the mark than if they had been the babblings of an idiot. But there were very many who believed as he believed.

Frank Hyde, however, as usual, took a common-sense view of every thing. From that, nothing could swerve him.

"Mr. Brayton," said he, "nothing could be clearer to my mind, now, than the fact that Matt Hinds was crazy. I did not fairly realize it till the minute he shot out into the river, and screamed back at me

those senseless words. It is not to be wondered at, either, that a man who had been hung, and, after being cut down, recovered his consciousness unexpectedly in the horrible hole where he found himself, should have lost his wits there, in his terror at his situation."

"But how could he have escaped, Frank? Nothing is more certain than that the walls of the cave are solid; you know that. And how do you account for that skeleton you found there?"

"Mr. Brayton, these are mysteries we can not solve. They have their explanation, of course, but we can not see now what it can be. Let these things pass. We have enough to deal with without them."

"That we have, Frank. Well—do you think he carried Molly off?"

"Oh, beyond a doubt, sir! He has been haunting the woods in his crazed condition, and he nas found some means of access to the island. When we were off on the hunt for Willie, he took that opportunity to lurk about the settlement, with all the cunning of a madman, and carry her off to the Island."

"Ah, Frank, how could he get there?" sighed Mr. Brayton.

"This is another mystery, and a deep one, I admit. But we must deal with *this* one, for the poor girl may be perishing with hunger."

"Shall you go over the rope to her?"

"No, not to-night. I have a presentiment—I can't account for it, but still I feel it—that something unexpected will occur to-night. And, in the mean time, this we know: Hinds is no longer with his victim. She is safe for the present, at least; and who can tell but she may now be on her way back to us? I tell you there is *something* about to happen that will make us all happy—I feel it—I know it; and, if she should come here to you to-night, I should not like to have that roaring waterfall between us! If I got over safely, I've not the hope to believe I could come back again over that frightful bridge till I had had a long rest to gather my strength."

In the evening of that day, quite a large party of our friends were gathered in the large kitchen (it was the parlor, too, as usual in these regions) of the house which Frank Hyde had built for his happy home with Molly Brayton. Among those present were John Bartlett, Jo Ransom, Pat Donnel, Mr. Brayton, etc. They sat about the fire, conversing on the one subject that occupied every mind completely. We will not recount the many conjectures, opinions and suggestions that were advanced by the different members of the group, for they all lacked practicability,

as they necessarily must. They only served to show how willing all were to do desperate things—how anxious to rescue the lost one from the fate that closed around her.

In the midst of their counseling with each other, the door leading to the small bedroom adjoining the kitchen was opened, and the majestic form of Oneyanha, the Indian patriarch, advanced and stood among them.

"My white brothers are met in council?" said the Indian, solemnly.

"Be me shoul," cried Pat, "av I ladn't fergot the ould Injin, complatly."

"Yes," said Frank Hyde, addressing the Indian; "we have lost the pride of the village, and we are trying to devise a means of recovering her."

"Oneyanha has heard," said the Indian. "The white man's beautiful squaw is gone. She is on the lone island, in the bosom of the Kahmahgo."

"Old man," said Hyde, rising to his feet, as a new hope darted through his breast, "your tribe once dwelt on this spot. You know the mystery of the island. Is there a way to reach it? Speak! Can you guide us there?"

The old Indian shook his head gravely.

"The lone island stands in the midst of the roaring flood," said he. "The foot of man was never set upon it. Oneyanha has seen the canoes of his tribe attempt the passage, but they were swept over the great fall, to rise no more."

A deeper gloom settled upon Frank Hyde's face at these words, which swept away the last lingering hope. He bowed his head in silent anguish.

"Oneyanha has heard his brothers talk," the Indian went on again. "The mad hunter's words, as he swept over the great fall, have been spoken. Speak them again."

"Hah!" cried Frank. "I understand what you mean. Matt Hinds cried out that he would meet me to-night in the Indian Cave of Bones. But I thought that merely a wild speech of his crazed tongue. You know that cave, Oneyanha?"

"Yes," said the Indian. "Oneyanha knows the cave where the bones of his tribe are lain. The cave is sacred to the Indian. No white man's eye has ever yet beheld it. But the white brother has been kind to Oneyanha; he saved his life when the mad hunter would have killed him. The Indian never forgets a kindness. Oneyanha will conduct him to the great cave. He can do no more."

"Ye shpake like a gintleman," said Pat Donnel, going up to the Indian. "I'm proud to know ye. Here's me fist upon

it," and Pat shook hands cordially with the Indian.

"We must start the minute day breaks," said Hyde. "I feel hope revive within me."

"Oneyanha will go to-night!" said the Indian. "It is always night in the great cave. Why wait for day? Will the white brothers follow?"

Every man sprung to his feet on the instant.

"Hurroo!" cried Pat, "three cheers fer ould mahogany! Hurroo!"

And the settlers made the little cabin ring with their shouts.

It was the work of but a few minutes to prepare for the expedition. Torches were gathered, and a supply of provisions laid in, in preparation for a long absence underground, if necessary; and, in a little while, the party filed off through the woods, led by the feeble old man, supported on Frank Hyde's stalwart arm. He was still very weak from his illness. He had not once left Frank's cabin since he entered it, some days ago; but, under the inspiration of his gratitude, he now walked quite briskly on, considering his advanced years.

At last they came to the stone in the dense thicket, which hid the narrow entrance to the cave. It was barely large enough to permit the passage of a man, but, one by one the settlers all passed through, and the stone fell back into its place.

CHAPTER VII.

The Olue, and how Mollie Brayton Fared.

"THAR'LL be stiff blowin' outside 'fore two hours," remarked John Bartlett, as he—the last of the party—passed into the cave. "Thar's no mistakin' that pertickler howl through the branches at this time o' year. It's b'en cold enough to 'most freeze, a dozen nights back. It'll be wet walkin' when we once get out o' here ag'in."

"Bedad, an' I'm thinkin' the same mesilf. But we're in a tight place here; that's wan comfort."

"Yes, 'twon't matter much to us how hard the storm tears it! We're under shelter. But, Lord! what if that gal should be cotched out in it? Thar's no tellin' what she's got to puerct her on the island."

The party moved onward, down the long incline of this new and hitherto unheard-of cavern, expressing their surprise and astonishment at every step, as its beauties broke upon their eyes. Through the long-drawn corridor, that stretched away in unbroken distance, they marched in Indian file, hold-

ing their blazing torches above their heads, and casting a lurid light upon the white walls of the cavern. It seemed as if they had come into a new world, for this cave was as totally unlike the other caves in the neighborhood, as could possibly be. It was as dry as the interior of a house, and, instead of the mud and wet to which their feet were accustomed in caverns, they found underfoot a hard, dry floor, upon which the tramp of the moving column fell with a monotonous regularity, and was echoed from above.

At last the passage suddenly grew wide and high, and they emerged into a spacious chamber, whose roof was so lofty that their torches failed to bring it entirely out of shadow. Around the circular sides of this chamber sat upright the skeletons of hundreds of Indian warriors, grinning hideously upon the wondering settlers. By the side of every skeleton lay some weapon of defense, so that there were altogether a great number of hatchets, knives, copper chisels, etc., while here and there lay a musket, with quantities of ammunition.

"The eyes of the white men rest on the bones of Oneyanha's dead brethren," said the old Indian. "White man never beheld this scene before. Oneyanha has brought him here. He will not abuse the red-man's confidence. These bones are sacred; these weapons are the property of the dead; the white man will not disturb them."

"No one shall disturb them, father," answered Hyde; "we will respect your faith, and we wish not these rusty tools. We wish to find our lost one. Are we any nearer to her, now that we are here?"

"Oneyanha knows not. The mad hunter spoke of the Indian Cave of Bones. I have brought you here. I can do no more."

Jo Ransom had been roaming about the great chamber, apart from the others, but near enough to overhear this conversation, which sounded with wonderful distinctness there.

"Say, look 'ere," cried Jo, "somebody's b'en at yer dead men, sure's preachin'. Here's one on 'em kicked over."

Oneyanha moved quickly to the spot, and bent upon his knees, examining the ground with keen scrutiny.

"The mad hunter has been here," he suddenly exclaimed; "he has profaned the dead. The bones of Odaghseghta have been shaken from their place. They have been borne from the Chamber of the Dead, for see, there is mold upon them, and mold never gathers here."

"Why do you think it was Matt Hinds that moved the bones?" said Hyde.

"Because," said the Indian, "no other knew of the Chamber of the Dead."

"If he has been here," said Hyde, in a strong tone of conviction, "this cave contains the secret of all the mysterious events of the past few months. Friends, our work is before us. Making this chamber our head-quarters, we must search every outlet till we find the lost girl."

Appointing two men to remain with the Indian in the great chamber, they now commenced in earnest the work of exploration. It was soon discovered that the cave extended but a short distance beyond this chamber. A short passage, ending abruptly in an unbroken wall, with a pool of water in the floor, concluded the movement in that direction.

"Bedad," said Pat Donnel, as he kicked a stone into the pool, "here's the twin brother o' th' well in the Black Cave!"

The return march was now set out upon. But the men did not, as before, pass on steadily, under the Indian's lead. With the axes some of them had brought, they sounded the wall of the passage, yard by yard, as they passed along, and with uplifted torches scrutinized every nook and cranny. They had nearly reached the point from which they started, when they were rewarded by discovering another passage, branching off from the main one. The entrance was almost hidden from sight, and it seemed at first as if a man's body could never be forced through the narrow crevice, but on trial it was found an easier thing to do than it at first appeared.

Now they were marching along another white-walled avenue, much like the first, except that it was narrower, and was not long dry underfoot.

"Hark!" cried Frank Hyde, after they had proceeded some minutes. "What is that rumbling sound?"

"We must be comin' out to the mouth o' this 'ere," said Bartlett; "that's thunder! The storm's a-blowin' great guns!"

Again they moved on in silence. The way grew more and more dangerous; the floor uneven and slippery with mud; and puddles of water lying here and there. The roaring sound grew louder and louder. Drops of blinding spray began to fly about, and it was with difficulty the torches were kept bright. At last the truth flashed upon them.

"The great falls are before us!"

A few more steps proved the truth of this assertion. The outlet of the cave was directly under the thundering cataract of the Kahuahgo.

"The mystery's a-clarin' up, said John

Bartlett. "A minute more'n we'll be under the falls! Take care!"

There they were—with the stream of headlong water pouring down before them with the noise and fury of ten thousand hurricanes!

It was useless to attempt to proceed further in the night. Half the torches were already quenched, as their bearers had sought to discover by their light the position of the strange spot to which they had come; and there was nothing to do but to make themselves as comfortable as possible where they were, till the breaking of the day.

Morning dawned at last, and they saw the perils of the way in all their strength. They could not have advanced ten feet further last night, without plunging themselves into the whirlpool below. But with the daylight to aid them, they perceived a flight of uneven natural steps, slippery with water but still passable to the feet of careful and determined men, down which they could climb, until they stood upon a projecting shelf beneath the fall, with the torrent pouring over their heads as they looked up, and down below them the boiling caldron which received the thundering flood.

"It is needless for us all to go further," said Hyde, as they stood now with their path clear before them. "We have conducted the search together, but now it is ended. Yonder lies the island. Three or four of us will go on, and as many more can keep watch here till we return with the girl. As for the rest of you, good friends, return to your homes with the good tidings."

Ransom, Donnel and Hyde took the perilous path under the cataract; Bartlett, and a couple of others, remained with Mr. Brayton in the cave, till the return of the rescuers.

"Good-by all," cried Bartlett, as the settlers turned to go home; "the search is jest th' same's done with. You needn't have no funder fears. We've got to th' bottom o' this myst'ry."

Moving with the utmost caution over the slippery way, the three men passed under the fall. The violence of the spray and wind was like a hurricane, and nearly took their breath from them. They had now and then to crawl upon all fours along the sloping shelf, where one mistaken movement would have been certain death. But at last they reached the opposite shore, and clambered into the entrance of a new cave, whose floor was on a level with the shelf over which they had passed.

Along the floor of this cave ran a thin stream of water, covering the floor completely, but so shallow that it did not come up to their ankles. Paying little heed to it at first, they pressed on, after lighting the torches which they had thrust into the bosoms of their homespun frocks, to keep them dry while they passed through the tempest under the cataract.

"Frank," said Ransom, as they splashed along through the narrow cave, "'pears like this water was a gittin' deeper!"

"Just what I was thinking, Ransom. I don't understand it. And—hark!—don't you hear a sound ahead there like a waterfall?"

"Howly mother!" cried Pat; "it's deepenin' ivery step we take!" It was true. Every minute the stream grew deeper and faster; it rose above their knees; it was with great difficulty they could press on. And presently their full danger was apparent.

"This cave opens on the river again!" cried Frank. "Boys, it's life or death now. Push on with all your might!"

They needed no urging, for now they plainly saw the entrance to the cave, several rods ahead, and down its mouth poured a constantly increasing stream of water. The cave opened at the head of the island. The river was rising rapidly, and the overflowing waters were seeking this means of passage to the river below. A very few minutes more, and a resistless torrent would sweep through the cave, bearing the men down its inclined floor, out to the river again, to plunge them into the whirlpool of death beneath the fall!

They strained every nerve to reach the outlet. The water was now fairly up to their waists, and their feet slipped continually from under them. Ten minutes more would seal their doom.

The clue leads us back to the time when poor Molly Brayton was seized in the arms of her unknown captor, and borne away. Deep into the forest the man plunged, with his beautiful burden upon his shoulder. She made no resistance, for she had fainted.

When she recovered from her swoon, the captured girl found herself in the great cave with which the reader is already acquainted. By her side sat the mad hunter, crouched upon his haunches, surveying his victim with an insane glee. The light of a torch cast its lurid glare upon the snow-white walls, and the scene was one that might have appalled a stouter heart than hers.

She did not recognize her captor, with his shaggy hair and beard, his ragged garments, and his bloodshot eyes.

"Who are you?" she asked, "and why have you brought me here?"

A burst of laughter was her only answer. In vain she besought the man to speak to her. All the long night he kept her there; it seemed months to her, in that gloomy cavern where daylight never pierced; and at last he motioned for her to follow him.

Faint with terror and despair, the poor girl struggled to do as she was bid; but her captor became impatient of her slow movement.

"Faster!" he yelled: "faster!"

"Alas! I can go no faster," she cried; "I am faint!"

Then the madman lifted his hand and struck her. She fell senseless to the ground. He threw her upon his shoulders again, and bounded away.

The dashing of fierce gusts of spray in her face revived her soon after, and she gazed around unable to conceive where she now was, with this roaring tempest about her. But she was soon deposited in another cave, and looking back beheld the fall she had passed beneath. But, she had no time for thought. Again her captor urged her forward, and at last they paused at the opening of the cave, where she saw the morning sun looking down.

A wild thrill of hope ran through her breast, but it was soon dispelled, for when she asked where she was, the man replied:

"You are on Night Island! Alone with me—with me! Ha, ha! You thought Matt Hinds was dead!"

"Matt Hinds!" ejaculated the wondering girl.

"You shall be my bride, pretty Moll! I'll make a queen of ye! I am the Black Hunter, and Night Island is my kingdom. You shall be my queen—my queen!"

She understood now. She realized the fearful fate that was before her—a prisoner on this uninhabited island, alone with a madman, for such she saw he was. Comprehending at once how vain would be the hope of mercy at those hands, she offered no pleadings or prayers.

There was a large quantity of game lying about on the floor of the cave, showing that the maniac had probably been preparing to receive her for some time. He made no movements toward preparing a meal, however; not even to the kindling of a fire. But, after amusing himself with staring at his prize, and laughing at her

pallid face, for an hour or so, he suddenly turned, and ran into the depths of the cave.

Left alone, Molly's first thought was as to how she should effect her escape. She climbed wearily up to the mouth of the cave, and looked about her. All was one dense growth of cedar and spruce, so thick and dark that it seemed impenetrable; and after a few minutes' hesitation, she returned into the cave and started to return by the way she had come. The maniac had thrown his torch upon the floor, but it was extinguished, and she had no means of lighting it. So she groped her way along in the darkness, and after a long time came to the opening under the fall. While questioning whether to attempt the perilous passage, she saw her captor approaching along the slippery shelf, and she shrunk back into the darkness, hoping he would pass her. But the cave was narrow, and he discovered her.

"Tryin' to run away, pretty Moll?" said he, with a mocking laugh. "Ye little fool, ye'd tumble in. That *would* be fine sport, wouldn't it? See!"

And he grasped her by the waist, and held her out over the foaming abyss. At first she feared he was going to hurl her into the stream, but he drew her back again, and bore her to the place in the cave from whence she came.

For long hours after, he danced about her like an Indian, whooping and laughing wildly, and calling her his queen. Until at last the night came down, and all grew dark. He threw himself down on the floor, and feigned sleep.

Long she waited there in silence, and then crept cautiously forth and plunged into the dense growth of evergreens above. But the maniac was close behind her, following with the stealthy tread of a panther. On she struggled, till she stood on the bank of the stream, and saw the lights gleaming in the houses of the settlers on the opposite shore. Then she cried aloud amid the roaring of the waters, "Frank! Father! Help me! Save me!" An instant after, she was seized from behind, and dragged away.

The next day, her companion did not leave her, and at night she went forth again, only to be seized and dragged back as before. The third day he left her about noon, and did not return. She found her way again to the falls, but in her now weak condition—for she had eaten nothing in all this time—she dared not attempt the perilous passage. Night came, and she sought the shore once more. And now her tor-

mentor appeared at her side with a torch, and danced about her, crying:

"Yell, pretty Moll, yell! They can't hear ye yet! Yell, I say! Louder! Louder!"

And at last he struck her to the ground with a fierce blow, and dragged her away once more.

How she passed the long hours that followed, poor Molly scarcely knew. She was only conscious that her captor departed the following morning, and came back no more. A fever seized upon her, for she had had no fire since she came there, and her garments had remained wet with the drenching of the tempest under the fall.

On the morning of the fifth day, in the midst of her delirium, she was awakened by the howling of the storm, and the trickling of water into the entrance of the cave. Looking about her she beheld the body of a partridge near her, and seizing it tore it in pieces, eating ravenously of the raw meat. Seeming to gather new strength after this, she struggled up the steep entrance of the cave, out into the open air. The air was dark with the storm, and the waters of the river were spreading over the island in a slow, shallow flood. The rain fell in torrents upon her bare head. The trees bent and sighed aloud in the storm, and the howling of the winds mingled with the roar of the falls on either side. She struggled away into the thick wood, and sunk insensible to the ground.

"Hurroo! Now fer it, lads! Whoo! Up she goes! Give us yer fiat, Mither Frank! Heah—heave! There ye are! Bedad, we're safe."

The three men had struggled through the stream of water at the mouth of the cave, and stood on the island.

"Out o' the fryin'-pan into th' fire!" said Jo Ransom, looking about on the tempestuous scene. "Look o' that, Frank. This here island 'll be flooded clean over in less'n an hour. We're in a purty fix!"

Frank made no answer. He was looking about him, as if to discover signs of the lost one.

"Somebody has passed through these bushes lately," he said. "Follow me, boys."

A minute later, they reached the body of poor Molly, lying half submerged in the water.

"My darling! my wife!" cried Frank, as he gathered her to his bosom. "Look up, Molly. Speak to me! It's Frank!"

But Molly made no response.

"Is she dead?" whispered Jo Ransom, bending over.

"Dead? No! She breathes! Her heart beats! Good God, where can we take her, in this horrible place?"

"Whist!" said Pat; "d'ye see thim rocks? They stan' high up, an' they might be higher than th' water 'll come. To 'em!" he cried, and they hurried away.

CHAPTER VIII.

Waiting, Watching, and a Wedding.

"I WONDER," said John Bartlett, "what in creation keeps 'em so! Night's a-comin' on, an' no signs on 'em yit. I'm half a notion to foller 'em."

"No, no, Bartlett," said Mr. Brayton, "let us stay where we are. We must not desert this post. We know nothing of the way they may have taken after passing under the fall. Patience, patience!"

"Oh, I'll hang on to th' last minute, Mr. Brayton," said John. "'Tain't that I care fer myself. I'd wait here till doom-crack ef necessary. But I'm gittin' a leetle disturbed 'bout th' boys. Seems to me they oughter be'n back long 'fore this."

Footsteps approached along the cave behind them. It proved to be three men from the settlement.

"Bad news, friends," said one, as he set down a basket of provisions he had brought. Th' island's flooded with water. Th' old Kahuahgo is riz tremendous. I never see the like since I come here."

"Then they are lost!" cried Mr. Brayton, in distress.

"I knowed suthin' was up," said Bartlett. "I'm a-goin' over, straight along."

"I will go with you," said Mr. Brayton.

"Now you keep still," said John. "You ain't got John Bartlett's legs, Mr. Brayton. 'Twouldn't be safe fer ye. I'd a good deal rather go alone. Keep still! I'll bring ye news o' some kind jest as quick as I git it."

And he clambered down the steps and disappeared under the fall. In a few minutes he returned, drenched through and through.

"'Tain't no use," said he. "The water's pourin' out o' th' cave on t'other side like a'll creation. Lord! I hope them boys got out safe. But ef th' island's flooded I don't see much hope for 'em. It's a mighty bad bus'ness, anyhow."

Up above, the settlers were gathered on the bank of the river, looking, with white faces, over to the island, where the pouring

water could be plainly seen covering the upper part of the land completely. The storm had ceased, but the roar of the river was absolutely deafening.

Night came down, and darkness closed over the scene. The next day, to the delight of all, it was found that the river had lowered again. The freshet was past, but who could tell the fate of the absent ones?

Little was done that day beyond waiting and hoping. Some went off to the cave where Bartlett still kept vigil; but they did not return.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, when there appeared a cluster of men on the shore of the island, waving their guns and apparently shouting. It was impossible to hear what was said, but it was plain they were giving vent to expressions of joy. John Bartlett and Jo Ransom were recognized, as well as the hilarious Mr. Donnel, who was dancing an Irish-jig with every appearance of satisfaction. They knew then that Molly was safe; but they did not know all.

Poor Molly! It was long before she recovered her health again; and for several days it was deemed best to keep her on the island. But Frank Hyde was with her, and the strong man watched over his darling and cared for her with the tenderness of a woman. Every thing that could minister to her comfort was carried to her through that long and perilous passage, by the hands of willing and brave men, who cared little for the dangers of the way, when they were working in so good a cause.

"Misthress Brayton," said Pat Donnel, presenting himself at the door of that lady's cabin, "have ye the bride-cake ready?"

"Why, Patrick, how do you do? You're quite a stranger. Come in and sit down."

"Thank ye, ma'm, but I haven't the time to shpare. I'm app'inted Minister Plenipotentiary from the Kingdom o' Night Island t' invite th' village to th' weddin' to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night!" cried Mrs. Brayton; "are they coming home, then?"

"No less," said Pat. "Ye're t' prepare fer th' bride to-morry, an' to-morry night she's t' be married—av Matt Hinds don't come t' life ag'in, an' I've small hopes o' him, faix."

Pat very quickly spread the news about the settlement; and the following day, true to his announcement, the bridal-party appeared in the village. A platform had been

constructed, with a box nailed in the middle, and the whole strewn with a bright carpet of evergreens; and seated on this, borne on the shoulders of half a dozen stalwart settlers, Molly rode, grasping the hand of Frank Hyde, who walked by her side. The roses were as bright in her cheeks as they had ever been, and a green wreath sat on her fair brow.

"Make way fer th' Quane!" cried Pat Donnel, as the strange procession approached. "Long life to ye, darlin'! Yer wel come home. Cl'ar the road, ye gossoon!"

The last remark was not addressed to our heroine, by any means, but to one of a gang of urchins who stared open-mouthed at the scene.

A minute more, and Molly was clasped to her mother's heart, and her face covered with kisses—not only by the mother, but by the combined female population of the place.

Never was there a livelier scene than the wedding-party that gathered in the dancing-hall at the tavern—which was only the dining-hall cleared for the occasion. Pat Donnel was the musician of the place, and, mounted on a table against the wall, he scraped away merrily on his violin, while the dancers "chased the hours with flying feet."

"Right and left," sung out Pat, from his perch. "Hands across! There ye are, Misther Bartlett! This way Jo, ye be trotter! Arrah, Quane Molly, ye're good fer the blind ayger; balance to Misther Smith, ye fairy! No huggin' the quane, Smith, ye spalpeen! Wurra, Ransom, ye're a drole crayture t' be kickin' yer heels at the quane's weddin'! Niver give in, Misther Frank! Balance four! Smith, be aff out o' that!"

By-and-by "supper" was announced; but nobody left the room, for they knew there was no need; the supper would come to them. It consisted of the usual simple edibles which are served up to guests on such occasions in new communities.

Pat Donnel made his appearance bearing a huge "bowl" of punch, brewed in a tin-pan.

"It's me own mannyfacture," said he; "I'm the boy for whisky-punch, be sure Quane Molly," he cried, as he moved over to her with a glass of the beverage in his hand, "wud ye taste me pride? Arrah, it'll niver hurt ye; it's as mild as mother's milk; oashins o' sugar an' nothin' but. It's a conjugal biverage. Av it's not swate enough ye can stir it wid yer little finger, darlin'!"

"Pray excuse me, Mr. Donnel; I'm

afraid it would be too strong for me," said Molly; but the winning smile with which she accompanied the refusal went warm to Pat's mercurial heart.

"Hurroo! boys! I'm b'lin' over wid irrepressible inspiration. Shtan' back, while I give ye a dance wid a song to it."

"Order! order!" cried several at once.

"Pat's going to give us one of his old style."

"An old shtyle it may be," said Pat, "but bedad the song's new, as ye'll find. Shtan' back now, while I welt the flure wid me brogues. Hoo!"

Away he went, the enthusiastic fellow, in a wild Irish jig, and presently commenced singing the following song—which, considering that he "made it up" himself, was not a bad one certainly. The tune he sung was something like that of "Mrs. McGuffin's Reel," and Pat's lively feet kept time, in a steady tattoo, to the song all the way through:

'Twas in the time o' Donnel's prime,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
What more I'll tell ye in me rhyme,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
Sure Mither Frank was playin' his pranks,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
Fer-which Matt Hinds gev him no thanks!
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
So Matt got mad like the auld Imp his dad,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
And bloody vengeance would a' had,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
But Hivin saved the broth ov a boy,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
To be his swate-heart's hope an' joy!
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
So Matt by this he lost his wits,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
An' bore swate Molly to the Divil's own pits,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
We hunted for her far an' wide,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
An' ivery cave about we tried,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
Be accident we cot the thafe,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
An' soon we brought him low in grafe,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
At last we f'und the darlin' wan
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
Ont on the island, nearly gon',
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
Wid shtarvin', and wid storms, avick,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
Small wonder she was taken sick!
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
But faith, all troubles have an ind,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
An' Jenny had full manny a fri'nd,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
We coaxed her up an' brought her home,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
An' she's the darlin' o' the room!
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
Faith, there she sits a laughin' now,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
Arrah, God bless her lovely brow!
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
So here's good-luck to Mither Hyde,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!
Long life to him an' his darlin' bride,
Phillilaloo! Hubbibaboo!

Late into the night the revel was prolonged; but Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hyde did not stay so late as did the roistering Mr. Donnel, nor were they compelled to be

carried off to bed in a state of hilarious oblivion, as Pat was.

The reader may still remain in the dark as regards some of the mysteries that have surrounded him in these pages, and hence we must not close without a few words more.

"How did Matt Hinds get out of the cave?" was a question that long remained unsettled. But it was accidentally discovered by Pat Donnel, (who had, with his usual luck, one day tumbled into the well in the cave, near the Indian Chamber of the Dead), that there was an outlet to the well in question. Suspecting that this might give a clue to the mystery, Pat dove through this passage, and, sure enough, emerged in the Black Cave.

It is easy to be seen how the skeleton came into the Black Cave, after this explanation. Matt Hinds, in his insane cunning, designing to play upon the superstitions of the settlers, and make them believe he was dead, had placed one of the Indian skeletons there; and afterward had removed it again in one of those whims of a madman for which there can be no accounting.

Where he obtained his gun and ammunition is a question never fully solved. It is not impossible that he might have ventured to the settlement in the night, and stolen a rifle; or it may have been that he made use of one of the rusty muskets in the Indian Chamber of the Dead.

THE END.

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